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Summit set to boost ties with Central Asia

Event expected to enhance cooperation, promote solidarity among the six nations

By **CAO DESHENG** in Xi'an
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping will host heads of state from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on Thursday and Friday in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, for the China-Central Asia Summit, a milestone event that is expected to boost the countries' economic cooperation and jointly tackle the region's security challenges at a higher level.

The summit takes place against the backdrop of the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, mounting geopolitical competition and the ongoing Ukraine crisis.

It is also taking place as the G7 Summit is due to be held from Friday to Sunday in Hiroshima, Japan. The G7 member states are expected to issue a statement on "economic security" that is likely to highlight issues such as countering China's so-called "economic coercion" and ending "dependence" on China in fields such as semiconductors and critical minerals.

Analysts said that the two summits would differ greatly in their outlook and approach.

They said that the G7 Summit would see Western nations, led by the United States, strive to build small circles that would further divide the international community and even create confrontation.

In marked contrast, the China-Central Asia Summit will help to strengthen solidarity and cooperation among countries in promoting economic recovery as well as regional peace and stability.

Mariam Shah, an independent researcher of conflict studies and military psychology in Islamabad, Pakistan, said that the Xi'an summit shows China's successful diplomatic efforts and growing regional influence by establishing comprehensive strategic partnerships with all five Central Asian countries, demonstrating high levels of trust and cooperation.

Head-of-state diplomacy enhances mutual trust, establishes cooperation mechanisms, and overcomes political obstacles, Shah said.

"One of the most important highlights is President Xi's active involvement and personal engagement in the summit, highlighting China's commitment to strengthening ties with Central Asian countries."

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Xi to put forward key proposals

President Xi Jinping will put forward a series of proposals on the long-term development of China and the Central Asian countries, and announce multiple pragmatic measures on cooperation between the two sides during the China-Central Asia Summit, a Foreign Ministry official said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a news conference in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, where the summit will be held on Thursday and Friday, Yu Jun, deputy director-general of the ministry's Department of European-Central Asian Affairs, said that Xi, in his keynote speech to the summit, will expound on China's position on the building of a China-Central Asia community with a shared future in the new era.

More than 20 bilateral and multilateral activities will be held during the summit, Yu said. Xi will chair the summit, and he will, together with presidents of five Central Asian countries, attend a ceremony for the signing of cooperation documents after the summit, and they will jointly meet the media, he said.

The leaders will also attend the launching ceremony of the Year of Culture and Art of the Peoples of China and Central Asia and the China-Central Asia Youth Arts Festival, Yu added.

He said that China-Central Asia cooperation targets no third party, and has no intention of competing with other mechanisms.

CAO DESHENG AND MO JINGXI

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XI'S VISION | CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Exchanges of young people contribute to friendship

By **MO JINGXI** in Xi'an
and **REN QI** in Almaty, Kazakhstan

When Sat Aslanbek watched a movie starring Chinese action star Jackie Chan on television at the age of 7, the Kazakh boy developed an interest in China and started to learn about the language, culture and history of the neighboring country.

Now, the 22-year-old is a first-year postgraduate student majoring in petroleum engineering at China University of Petroleum-Beijing.

President Xi Jinping recently replied to a letter from Central Asian students at the university. Aslanbek said he was motivated by Xi's words, and this firmed up his confidence in devoting himself to promoting cooperation between Kazakhstan and China.

In his letter, Xi encouraged the students, whom he referred to as "envoys of friendship" and "bridges of cooperation", to contribute to building an even closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

"I used to be an intern at the representative office of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Kazakhstan, so I hope I can continue to work to facilitate bilateral trade ties after graduation," Aslanbek said in fluent Chinese.

He was the first-prize winner of the "Chinese Bridge" language proficiency competition last year in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

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Medical help from China

Doctor Zhu Zhenjun (left), who is head of the 16th Chinese medical team to Eritrea, diagnoses a patient at Halibet Hospital in Asmara, Eritrea, on May 9. Since the medical team's arrival in the East African country on April 17, the doctors have conducted 346 operations and 2,120 examinations for local patients. Nearly 300 Chinese doctors have provided medical services in Eritrea since 1997. WANG GUANSEN / XINHUA

DEMAND RISES FOR NATION'S CANNED FOOD EXPORTS

Production capacity expanded to cater to wide range of tastes

By **ZHU WENQIAN** in Beijing,
ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
and **QIU QUANLIN** in Guangzhou

indepth

Cans containing Dolma — salty rice and meat wrapped in pickled grape leaves — were loaded onto trucks at a company in Heze, Shandong province, this month, before being transported to Qingdao Port for shipment to Europe, where demand for the product is growing.

Despite not meeting the taste preferences of most domestic consumers, China has exported a large volume of this food to many countries in Europe and the Middle East.

This year, canned food exports from China have continued to rise as inflation remains high in some countries, with prices of food sourced locally soaring.

Dolma is the main product of Heze Palexpo Food Co, which is based in the city of Heze.

This year, the company has received a growing number of overseas orders. Its sales revenue reached 6.5 million yuan ($935,000) in January, 7 million yuan in February and 8 million yuan in March.

Most of its products were exported to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Germany and the United States. Recently, the company received more orders from other markets such as northern Europe.

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Ministry aims to improve travel market

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HIGHER GROUND

Economy maintains growth momentum

By **WANG KEJU**
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China's economy maintained strong growth momentum in April, with gauges of consumption and services gathering pace, improving the outlook for steady growth of the world's second-largest economy this year, officials and analysts said.

The foundation for the steady growth, however, is still not solid as internal drivers are not strong enough and demand is still insufficient. Greater support should be given to bolstering demand, spurring investment and anchoring expectations, they added.

Retail sales of consumer goods — a major gauge of consumption — rose 18.4 percent year-on-year to 3.49 trillion yuan ($501 billion) in April, and expanded by 7.8 percentage points from the level in March, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Tuesday.

The recovery of consumption is still in its early stages. As the economy improves, with greater employment and an improved consumption environment, the driving force of consumption will be further strengthened, said NBS spokesman Fu Linghui.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said that despite rapid growth in consumption of high-end goods — like jewelry — and services such as catering, expenditure on durable goods such as furniture and home appliances remained subdued in April.

In the face of sluggish external demand, China needs to further boost domestic consumption, with a focus on durable goods, Zhou said, adding that preferential policies such as those for home appliance upgrades and related subsidies should be rolled out.

The index of services production rose by 13.5 percent year-on-year in April, according to the bureau. The rise was 4.3 percentage points higher than the previous month.

Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee, said that pent-up demand in the services sector, especially contact-based services, has been unleashed gradually after the country optimized its COVID-19 response measures.

The value-added industrial output, a gauge of activity in the manufacturing, mining and utilities sectors, rose 5.6 percent year-on-year in April, and expanded by 1.7 percentage points from the level in March, the data showed. Fixed-asset investment in the first four months climbed 4.7 percent year-on-year, 0.4 percentage points lower than that of the first three months.

Zhou said that the two figures fell short of market expectations due to sluggish demand. Policy steps to further tap consumption potential and expand effective investment should be better leveraged to fuel economic recovery.

Fu, the NBS spokesman, said that the Chinese economy continued to rebound in April through more enabling factors. However, given the complex and severe international landscape and insufficient domestic demand, the internal driving forces for economic growth remain modest.

China's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, edged up 0.1 percent year-on-year in April, according to the bureau.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said in its first-quarter monetary policy report on Monday that it will keep abreast of any marginal changes in price levels and anchor social expectations, while ensuring prudent monetary policy to provide an appropriate amount of steady support.

Zhou Lanxu contributed to this story.

A worker processes products at a textile factory in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Monday. CHU BAORUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

VISIT…

LANZAROTE

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PAGE TWO

Food: Domestic market seizes new opportunities

From page 1

Antonios Vassatis, the company's general manager, who is Greek, said: "In the past few years, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on demand for Dolma internationally, and our orders have fluctuated. Europe has become a new market, which has given us fresh business opportunities.

"Many Chinese consumers are not used to the taste of grape leaves, but Greeks have been enjoying them for hundreds of years. They are a typical pre-meal snack for residents in the Middle East, where they are regarded as a staple food in some countries. The rice our company uses is non-genetically modified, and we have our own professional cooperatives and planting areas."

Last year, China exported 3.13 million metric tons of canned food, a 12 percent rise year-on-year. The value of such exports in the nation reached $6.89 billion, up by 22 percent on the figure for 2021, with both the export volume and value hitting record highs in recent years, the China Canned Food Industry Association said.

The association added that last year, canned food exports to the United States rose by 19 percent year-on-year, to Russia by 23 percent, and to Hong Kong by 63 percent.

Vassatis said that to better satisfy preferences in different countries and regions, the company has broadened the range of flavors it offers. In addition to Dolma, which tastes of tomatoes, lemons and pomegranates, it introduced flavors such as pepper and parsley.

The company also improved the design of its packaging — introducing a new wrapper that makes it easier to recognize the brand, and which has helped the company boost its reputation abroad and increase its market share.

In 2011, the head of Heze Palexpo found there were abundant grape leaves in the western part of China, and had the idea of building a factory to manufacture Dolma. Vassatis then traveled to the country to choose a site and set up the new business.

The company has received orders from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Greece and other European countries. Its annual export value exceeds $11 million, while the number of its employees has grown to more than 400.

Heze Palexpo has also obtained certification to produce vegetarian, halal and kosher food. A comprehensive quality control system has enabled the company to gain strong market competitiveness in global trade.

With growing demand for canned food overseas, enterprises in China have expanded their production capacity, and the export categories and total export volumes for such food are expected to continue rising.

Early last month, 18 tons of canned apples were shipped to Japan from Yantai, Shandong. The cans were produced by Yantai Shenglong Food Co. In the first quarter, the company exported 629 tons of canned fruit, more than double the volume compared with the same period last year.

Guo Yijia, the company's trade manager, said: "This year, we have seen booming sales and growing overseas orders for our canned apples and pears in syrup. Canned food is convenient to eat, has a long quality guarantee period, and is relatively cheap. We are continuing to develop new products, markets and customers, and have expanded our overseas market share."

"We have seen booming sales and growing overseas orders for our canned apples and pears in syrup. We are continuing to develop new products, markets and customers, and have expanded our overseas market share."

Guo Yiji, trade manager of Yantai Shenglong Food Co in Yantai, Shandong province, which exported 629 metric tons of canned fruit in the first quarter of this year

Top: Canned oranges are produced at a factory in Zigui, Hubei province. WANG GANG / XINHUA **Above:** Workers make canned meat at a factory in Suining, Sichuan province. ZHONG MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Left: Dolma, a type of canned food, is produced at Heze Palexpo Food Co in Heze, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Right: A customer inspects a jar of peaches at a supermarket in Jilin, Jilin province. SHI HONGYU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Most Chinese consumers consider the shelf life of canned food to be relatively long, but that such food contains a large amount of preservatives, which could be harmful to health. As a result, they feel that eating fresh food is a healthier option.

Unlike the Chinese market, canned food is a typical choice for many consumers in Europe and the US.

Although there is low enthusiasm for such food among consumers in China, the domestic canned food industry has established a solid foundation and has developed rapidly.

In the 1950s, China exported canned food for the first time, starting with a small volume of fruit. Later, the export varieties and quantity increased gradually each year.

In recent years, more than half the top 10 countries with the highest consumption volumes for canned food globally were in Europe, with Sweden topping the list. The annual per capita consumption volume for canned food in Sweden exceeds 33 kilograms, about six times higher than that in China, data from the China Canned Food Industry Association show.

Asia, Europe, Africa and North America are China's largest export destinations for canned food. Tinned vegetables and fruit account for the largest share, and export volumes of canned instant food and mushrooms have risen significantly in recent years, the General Administration of Customs said.

Sun Baiyu, manager at a food trading company based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, said inquiries about shipping canned food overseas are placed on social media platforms every day. He visits local customs officials frequently to complete clearance procedures for exporting canned corn and bamboo shoots.

With overseas demand mounting for canned food from China, the company exported 500 containers last year. After a sharp rise in orders in the first quarter of this year, it expects the export volume for its products to rise by 20 percent this year compared with 2022.

Other canned food manufacturers in Guangdong have also boosted their production capacity since the second half of last year to meet increased overseas demand.

Li Zhongbin, general manager of Jiangmen Jiangfan Aquatic Products Co, said the company has expanded production capacity, as demand for canned vegetables, seafood and mushrooms has risen significantly since July.

Based in Jiangmen, Guangdong, the company started producing canned vegetables in 2004. This year, the volume of its monthly orders rose by about 10 percent year-on-year.

Canned food is produced by more than 46,000 enterprises in China, with Guangdong topping the list with over 14,000 such companies. Qichacha, a company that tracks business registrations, said that last year, 430 companies registered to produce canned food in China.

In the domestic market, evolving lifestyle and consumption patterns have resulted in the canned food industry embracing a long-awaited business opportunity, fueled by the popularity of ready-to-cook meals, especially since the pandemic emerged.

Semi-cooked and quick-frozen Chinese food only requires simple reheating, and can be delivered with extended quality guarantee times. Sales of such meals, including meat, seafood, vegetables and hot pot, have grown rapidly.

Producing precooked dishes such as braised pork ribs and high-end ingredients like abalone requires vital sterilization and sealing processes, and related technologies in the canning process.

Industry experts forecast that the continued emergence of new concepts, formats and models in food production and distribution, coupled with changes in consumer demand, will provide new business opportunities for the revitalization of the canned food industry in China.

Contact the writers at zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Shandong clothing company thrives on orders from the Middle East

By **ZHU WENQIAN** in Beijing and **ZHAO RUIXUE** in Jinan

Employees at a clothing company in Juye county, Heze, Shandong province, have been busy making Arabic pants, with the business receiving its fourth such order this year valued at more than 10 million yuan ($1.45 million) from customers in the Middle East.

In the first quarter, Heze Zijin Clothing Co exported more than 260,000 items of clothing, a year-on-year rise of 30 percent. Based on demand, its number of orders this year is expected to surpass expectations, the company said.

Chen Li, deputy general manager, said: "The steady growth in our orders is partly due to the combined impact of a series of export policies in China, such as optimized tax refunds. By making our deliveries on time, we have also won the trust of many overseas customers."

Originally established as a poverty alleviation workshop, the company has provided jobs for more than 3,000 workers in the region, with an average monthly salary of more than 4,500 yuan. Every day, these workers make some 35,000 woven pants, with all the products exported to the Middle East.

One of those to benefit from the company's success is Wang Zhenzhen, who used to be a farmer earning an income mainly from traditional crop planting. Since the clothing company was established near her home, she has become a sewing machine operator.

Workers make clothing for customers in the Middle East at a company in Juye county, Heze. ZANG DONGMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

After two years of learning and training, Wang became a group leader, with a monthly income of more than 6,000 yuan.

"Many women in my village start working at the factory after a short period of training. The work provides opportunities for us to make more money, and the flexible hours enable us to take care of the elderly and children," Wang said.

The company, founded in 2018, and other 11 clothing companies in the county mainly produce *abaya* (full-length garments worn by some Muslim women), woven pants and underwear.

Their products are exported to more than 20 countries and regions, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan.

The companies' business has not been affected greatly by fluctuations in the international market, or the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has built a long-term stable strategic partnership with customers in the Middle East.

Their clothing exports account for 65 percent to 70 percent of the market share in the Middle East, where the company enjoys a stable leading market share in Saudi Arabia.

Contact the writers at zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

TOP NEWS

Premier calls on Netherlands to uphold market principles

By XU WEI
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Premier Li Qiang has called on the Netherlands to uphold the spirit of contract and the principles of the market and the World Trade Organization to protect the interests of Chinese and Dutch companies and ensure unimpeded global industry and supply chains.

Li reiterated Beijing's readiness to collaborate with the Netherlands in various sectors, saying during a telephone conversation with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Tuesday that China sees the Dutch side as a priority for cooperation within the European Union.

Beijing's EU policy has maintained a high level of consistency and stability, Li said, adding that he hopes the Netherlands can make greater efforts to help advance China-EU relations.

The phone call came after China's Foreign Ministry expressed disapproval to the Dutch side in March over the Netherlands' decision to apply new restrictions on chip exports before the summer on so-called national security grounds, calling on the country to "refrain from abusing export control regimes".

Rutte, who met with China's Vice-President Han Zheng in the Hague last week, said his nation is willing to maintain close high-level exchanges with China, a key partner for the Netherlands, and deepen bilateral cooperation in economy, trade, water resources and response to climate change.

He called on both sides to bring the open and pragmatic comprehensive cooperative partnership between the two nations to a higher level, adding that the Dutch side will continue to serve as a bond and bridge for China-EU cooperation.

The Netherlands is China's second-largest trading partner within the EU, and trade between the two countries grew by 12 percent year-on-year to $130.2 billion in 2022.

Exchanges: Students vow to strengthen friendship

From page 1

Rahman Bayramdurdyyev, from Turkmenistan, was one of the authors of the letter to Xi in which the students from Central Asian countries expressed their determination to study hard and strengthen their home countries' cooperation with China.

"We had expectations when we wrote the letter, but did not expect to actually receive a reply from President Xi," he said.

Bayramdurdyyev has been living in China for 13 years and is now a doctoral student majoring in the Sinicization of Marxism.

He said many of the students from Central Asia had received scholarships from China to study at the university, and were very appreciative for being given this opportunity.

Bayramdurdyyev said China has made remarkable achievements over the past years, and that's why he came to the country.

Ravil Latypov, a postgraduate student at China University of Petroleum-Beijing, said that Xi's letter would help to further bolster people-to-people exchanges.

Recent years have seen increasingly frequent people-to-people exchanges between China and the five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Yang Lei, the Chinese director of Eurasian National University's Confucius Institute in Astana, is a witness to this.

"Since our institute was established in 2007, it has been attended by more than 10,000 Kazakh people who know Chinese, and most of them are young students," Yang said.

He said that the young Chinese and Kazakhs who are now actively engaged in bilateral communication in all fields have become the envoys of China-Kazakhstan friendship.

"I felt greatly honored to have witnessed their progress. I expect to see more bridges of cooperation and exchanges established between people in China and Central Asian countries," he said.

In January last year, Xi announced at a virtual summit that China would provide 1,200 government scholarships over five years to the five Central Asian countries, with priority given to opening Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms.

Gao Hanxun, an associate researcher of Central Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that since ancient times, Central Asia has been an important hub connecting different civilizations.

"After the great ancient 'Silk Road' was opened up, people living in China started to visit the West, while businesspeople, envoys, monks and priests came to China and went back to their hometowns with information about the mysterious country in the East," Gao said.

Nowadays, multifaceted and all-around people-to-people exchanges, especially among young people, between China and Central Asian countries epitomize their concerted efforts in building the Belt and Road Initiative based on equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, he said.

"As President Xi stressed in his letter, young people shoulder the responsibility to carry forward the friendly relations between China and Central Asian countries from generation to generation," said Saodat Nasirova, the Uzbek director of the Confucius Institute of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, the first Confucius Institute established in Central Asia.

Nasirova said most of the young people who had attended the institute had gone on to become involved in work related to the Chinese language and achieved good results. For example, some students became full-time teachers after pursuing advanced studies in China, and some others work for China-Uzbekistan trade companies.

Sardor Ganiev, an Uzbek student at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said the closer ties between Central Asian countries and China have brought major changes to Uzbekistan, especially after his country joined the BRI.

"Many Chinese companies invest and open factories in Uzbekistan. This has helped promote local economic development and created many jobs," he said.

Ganiev said he believes that the people-to-people exchanges between China and Central Asian countries will certainly be facilitated when the leaders sit down and discuss practical cooperation during the upcoming China-Central Asia Summit.

Contact the writers at mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Asian Games express

A special subway train themed on the Asian Games starts operation on Tuesday, departing from Xiaoshan International Airport station in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. The Games will be held in Hangzhou and five other cities in Zhejiang from Sept 23 through Oct 8.
FANG JIANFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Man on 'Mars'

A visitor wearing a spacesuit experiences the Mars Base 1 Camp in Jinchang, Northwest China's Gansu province, on Monday. Located in the Gobi Desert, Mars Base 1 Camp simulates the living environment of astronauts on Mars. LI YALONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Experts: Transit port to bolster regional growth

Trade via Vladivostok to help attract more investment to Northeast China

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's move to add Vladivostok in Russia as a cross-border transit port for domestic trade shipments from Jilin province will further bolster economic growth in its northeastern region, trade and logistics experts said on Tuesday.

Starting on June 1, goods shipped from Jilin to domestic destinations can travel through the port in Vladivostok, a city in the Russian Far East, China's General Administration of Customs said in an online notice late on Monday.

This decision is in line with the national strategic plan to boost the old industrial base in Northeast China and simplify cross-border transportation of domestic goods via international ports, the GAC said.

Domestic cross-border transportation refers to the transportation of goods originating from within the Customs boundaries, which are shipped from domestic ports of departure and transported through foreign countries to other domestic ports of arrival, according to the Beijing-based China Chamber of International Commerce.

China has been implementing this approach to reduce the transportation costs of bulk goods for businesses in Northeast China since 2007. It allowed the transfer of goods from Heilongjiang, another northeastern province, to ports in neighboring countries for transit and subsequently to ports in its southern provinces for entry, following international transit protocols.

This move aligns with internationally accepted Customs practices, and China has accumulated practical experience in this area over the years, said the head of the GAC's Department of Port Control in another statement released on the administration's website.

Xiao Wen, a professor at the School of Economics at Zhejiang University, said Northeast China — comprising Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces — serves as a vital production and storage hub for industrial goods, raw materials, grains and energy.

However, the region has faced limitations in its economic growth due to the challenges in transporting goods to the country's eastern and southern regions. Adding Vladivostok as a transit port is expected to address this issue by enhancing accessibility to seaports for Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces, Xiao said.

Feng Hao, a researcher at the National Development and Reform Commission's Institute of Comprehensive Transportation, explained that previously, goods from Heilongjiang and Jilin had to be transported by road and railway to Dalian, a port city in Liaoning province, before being transferred to other ports across the country, such as Shanghai, Ningbo in Zhejiang province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

"This shipping process required additional time and expenses," Feng said, noting that with the option of transferring goods through Vladivostok, which houses Russia's largest port in the Pacific Ocean, the land transportation distance can be significantly shortened in the coming years.

The reduced distance will in turn cut costs for manufacturers and commodity providers in Northeast China.

Companies in Jilin and Heilongjiang won't necessarily have to use the Dalian port, which can be more than 1,000 kilometers away from certain cities in these two provinces, said Da Zhigang, director of the Institute of Northeast Asian Studies at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences.

In contrast, Vladivostok port is situated less than 100 kilometers from the Chinese border and about 500 kilometers from the provincial capitals of Jilin and Heilongjiang, respectively.

The establishment of the new transit port in Vladivostok will also serve as a catalyst for attracting investment and business opportunities to Northeast China in the next stage, said Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

By opening Vladivostok port, China and Russia can further collaborate on port construction and logistics development, thereby boosting the economic dynamism of Northeast China and growth of Russian Far East, he said.

Summit: Fruitful outcomes expected

From page 1

At a virtual summit last year commemorating the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Central Asian countries, the presidents of the six countries jointly announced the building of a China-Central Asia community with a shared future, and the China-Central Asia cooperation mechanism came into being, characterized by openness, transparency, mutual benefit, equality, reciprocity and real results.

Addressing the virtual event, Xi said that the key to successful cooperation between China and the five Central Asian countries is their abiding commitment to mutual respect, good-neighborly friendship, solidarity in trying times and mutual benefit.

The Foreign Ministry has said that during the Xi'an summit, the presidents of the six countries will exchange views on the development of the China-Central Asia mechanism, cooperation in various sectors and major international and regional issues of common interest, draw up a new blueprint for China-Central Asia relations and usher in a new era for cooperation between the two sides.

Fruitful outcomes in political, economic and security areas are expected as the participants seek new cooperation agreements.

Shakhrat Nuryshev, the Kazakh ambassador to China, said that the primary objective of the summit is to initiate a new stage of cooperation between Central Asian countries and China.

"An important point is that the Central Asian region is seen here as an integral entity, not divided into five separate nations, but rather engaging with China in unity in the spirit of neighborly friendship. Therefore, we keenly anticipate it," Nuryshev said in an article published on the website of China Global Television Network.

BRI collaboration

Central Asia is where the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed, and it is also one of the regions to have reaped the early fruits of the initiative.

China's trade with the five countries increased to $70.2 billion in 2022 from $460 million in 1992, when China established diplomatic ties with the nations.

Investment cooperation has also benefited all sides. As of the end of March, China's direct investment stock in the five Central Asian countries stood at over $15 billion. The cumulative turnover of completed projects reached $63.9 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The summit in Xi'an, historically known as Chang'an, the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, will further build up the consensus between China and the Central Asian countries on high-quality development of the Belt and Road, and enable them to continue to act as the pacesetter of BRI cooperation, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular news conference on Tuesday.

Uzbek envoy hails cooperation between two countries

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

The visit by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to China will undoubtedly give new momentum to the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, with a package of agreements in politics, trade and culture expected to be signed, said the country's top envoy in Beijing.

Mirziyoyev will be in China for a state visit and attend the China-Central Asia Summit, which is to be chaired by President Xi Jinping in Xi'an, Shannxi province, on Thursday and Friday.

Farhod Arziev, Uzbekistan's ambassador to China, said in an interview with China Daily that thanks to joint efforts, bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and China are close today and practical cooperation is deepening in virtually all areas.

"The two countries are mutually interested in further expanding and deepening cooperation in the trade, economic, investment and innovation fields," Arziev said. In addition, potential for cooperation in terms of energy, green economy, artificial intelligence, digitalization and e-commerce remains to be unlocked, he said.

According to the Foreign Ministry, trade between China and Uzbekistan was $9.78 billion last year. China was Uzbekistan's largest trading partner in the first quarter of this year, with trade volume reaching $2.35 billion, statistics from the Uzbek side showed.

"China is not only a 'global factory', but also a 'global market'. Therefore, Uzbekistan is interested in maximizing the use of these opportunities and giving full play to the complementary advantages of our economies," the ambassador said.

Arziev noted that his country attaches great importance to creating all necessary conditions for the successful activities of foreign investors, including Chinese investors.

The Uzbek envoy said poverty reduction has also become an important area of practical cooperation.

"China's successful experience creates good opportunities for exchange and cooperation in the development of rural industries, the modernization of the agricultural sector, and the strengthening of rural infrastructure," he said.

Last month, Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Kuchkarov led a delegation to Yunnan province in Southwest China, where he learned about China's poverty alleviation experience and rural development.

When meeting with Chinese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Tang Renjian, Kuchkarov said China's poverty reduction experience is worth learning. He added that Uzbekistan is willing to work with China to propel bilateral cooperation in poverty reduction and achieve mutual benefit and win-win results.

Ambassador Arziev said a subcommittee on poverty reduction will be established within the framework of the bilateral intergovernmental cooperation committee.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, and Uzbekistan is one of the first countries to support and participate in the initiative.

Arziev said that one priority for Uzbekistan in cooperating with China within the framework of the BRI is the implementation of transportation and communication projects, among them the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line.

During the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in September, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation to advance the project.

"The implementation of this project will reduce the delivery time of goods between the countries of Central Asia and China and ease the cargo flow along existing routes," Arziev said. The railway will not only benefit the three countries, but will also be of great importance in connecting the Eurasia region and ensuring a seamless supply chain.

Arziev also noted the over 2,000-year history of contact between Uzbekistan and China, saying that the two countries share a lot of similarities in their traditions and values.

"Our modern world is highly interconnected, and any situation or problem that arises in one region is inevitably reflected in other parts of the world. In this regard, the Chinese president's concept of a community with a shared future for mankind is very relevant and in demand," he said.

CHINA

Social media accounts closed for fake news

Internet platforms required to inspect content to clear out malicious rumors

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

More than 107,000 online accounts have been shut down in the past month for falsely representing news anchors or press agencies, as part of China's latest efforts to eliminate fake news and rumor-mongering.

Under the requirement of the country's Cyberspace Administration, all internet operators, especially those providing short videos and hot issue rankings, have begun inspecting and clearing out accounts on their platforms that have been alleged to have created or spread fake news since April 6.

A total of 835,000 pieces of fake news were removed during the campaign, in addition to the closure of the accounts, according to data released by the administration on Monday.

The move came after the authority noticed the frequent disturbance of communication in cyberspace and received many relevant complaints from netizens, it said.

"Some accounts were found to pretend to be authoritative news outlets to mislead the public by means of falsifying news studios, imitating newscasters or abusing the use of virtual anchors generated by artificial intelligence," it said.

"Some were discovered making fake news related to hot issues, including those on social incidents, cases or international political affairs, to instigate public emotions or attract online views by cutting, editing or shuffling information," it added.

Since the campaign started, microblogging platform Sina Weibo has posted inspection results every week on its official account. The latest data on May 11 showed that it removed 1,508 pieces of fake news in the first week of May, with punishment of 1,181 accounts and 1,079 users that falsified news anchors or agencies.

Weibo had already opened an official account for exposing those who make or spread various rumors on its platform, as well as for asking relevant authorities to respond to issues that created controversies.

On Monday, a number of typical examples that distorted news or spread misinformation were listed by the administration.

One of the fake news stories targeted Hu Xinyu, a missing student who was later confirmed to have taken his own life in Jiangxi province on Feb 2. The false story said that Hu had been killed by others before the authorized information was announced.

From the time the 15-year-old boy went missing to the time the truth came out, the administration said in mid-February that 1,894 online accounts were punished for making and spreading false information about the case.

In a recent 100-day campaign led by the Ministry of Public Security, more than 70,000 pieces of information and over 2,000 accounts were removed or punished. It disclosed a case in which an internet user surnamed Cao in Jiangxi province was criminally detained for suspicion of making rumors that Hu's body was fake and Hu's family members had been captured.

Royal pigs

Piglets attract an audience at a pig fair in Chongqing's Rongchang district on Tuesday. After selections were held across the district, the organizers selected three boars and three sows for the finals. Experts judged them on physical appearance, growth and breeding performance to crown the "Pig King" and "Pig Queen". ZHOU YI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

16-year-old girl summits world's tallest mountain

A 16-year-old girl from Changsha, Hunan province, successfully reached the summit of Qomolangma, known as Mount Everest in the West, on Monday morning, becoming the youngest Chinese female to conquer the world's highest peak from the southern slope, according to State broadcaster China Central Television.

Xu Zhuoyuan is a first-year high school student at Hunan Normal University Affiliated Middle School. On April 15, she left Changsha for Nepal. On April 21, she began her trek from Lukla. On April 28, she arrived at the base camp and started her altitude acclimatization training.

At 10 pm Beijing time on Sunday, Xu started trekking from Camp 4 at an altitude of 7,950 meters on the southern slope of Qomolangma. After a grueling 10-hour climb, she successfully reached the summit.

Xu Zhuoyuan's father, Xu Jianglei, was the first person from Hunan province to reach the summit of Qomolangma. Influenced by her father, Xu Zhuoyuan has been exploring remote areas with him since she was very young.

Despite her young age, Xu Zhuoyuan has already climbed five mountains over 5,000 meters in China. When she was 12 years old, she made a bold statement on Hunan TV saying, "I will climb Qomolangma."

Xu Zhuoyuan

Four years later, she fulfilled her promise.

Although Xu Zhuoyuan has rich climbing experience, she has been undergoing high-intensity professional training non-stop to conquer Qomolangma. Last year, she climbed Mount Muztagata, which stands 7,546 meters.

"Human beings are small in the face of nature. We should respect nature and get closer to Qomolangma," said Xu Zhuoyuan.

She brought the gloves her father used when he reached the summit with her as a form of inheritance and to bear witness to her own dream coming true. After finishing her university studies, she hopes to continue climbing and achieve the "7+2" (7 summits plus the North and South Poles).

CHINA DAILY

Classroom struggle

High school seniors participate in an arm-wrestling competition in their classroom in Linyi, Shandong province, on Tuesday. The school organized a variety of fun activities for the seniors to help them release their stress ahead of the college entrance examination next month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Former official pleads guilty in Heilongjiang corruption case

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

At a public trial in Qitaihe, Heilongjiang province, on Monday and Tuesday, Zhao Zhonghou, 66, former chairman of the Education, Science, Culture and Health Committee of the Heilongjiang People's Congress, pleaded guilty to taking bribes, embezzlement, holding a huge amount of property with unidentified sources and money laundering.

The trial took place at Qitaihe Intermediate People's Court. The outcome will be announced later, according to a statement released by the court on Tuesday.

Prosecutors from the Qitaihe People's Procuratorate said that from early 2001 to November 2019, Zhao took advantage of his positions to seek benefits for companies and individuals in work promotion, post adjustment, staff recruitment, project contracting and equipment procurement.

He had been Party secretary and director of the Heilongjiang Institute of Health Supervision; deputy Party secretary and director of the Heilongjiang Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention; deputy Party secretary, deputy director, Party secretary and director of the Heilongjiang Health Commission and numerous other positions.

In return, he received money and property totaling 170 million yuan ($24.4 million), prosecutors said.

Zhao was also found to have embezzled public funds of more than 19.4 million yuan himself or while colluding with others, according to prosecutors.

Zhao's personal property is worth far more than the income he was receiving could have sustained. He could not explain how he obtained property worth 67.9 million yuan.

From May to November 2021, Zhao transferred more than 40.8 million yuan via other people's bank cards to cover up his crimes, prosecutors said.

During the trial, they showed the evidence and Zhao pleaded guilty after making a final statement. More than 160 people attended the trial.

Zhao was born in Shuangyashan, Heilongjiang, joined the workforce in 1978 and joined the Communist Party of China in 1983.

He served as chairman of the Education, Science, Culture and Health Committee of the Heilongjiang People's Congress from March 2017 to December 2019. He retired in March 2020.

Aerial system obtains glacier data

A Chinese aerial remote sensing system has obtained effective mountain glacier detection data through an ongoing combined detection experiment.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences and Wuhan University are conducting a sky-ground scientific experiment to test the condition of glaciers in the Haibei Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Northwest Qinghai province.

The experiment has applied radars in three bands — P-band, L-band and Very High Frequency — and undertaken 11 flights, among which seven carried out tomography and interferometric imaging and four conducted perspective imaging.

A total of 4.6 terabytes of data have been obtained.

The experiment also involved visible light and lidar flight observation of the ice surface, the calibration of instruments used to analyze the surface of the ice, the measurement of glacier thickness using ground-penetrating radar, and extra-long visual distance three-dimensional cloud imaging.

The data shows that three-dimensional reconstruction can reflect the trend of glacier surface elevation and the boundary lines between ice and atmosphere, and between glacier and bedrock. Researchers used the data to target the location of an electrical anomaly that had been artificially placed at a depth of 80 meters in an ice core borehole.

The experiment has verified a comprehensive glacier characteristics observation technique and tested the feasibility of the joint P-band, L-band and VHF experiment. It has also obtained effective data, which will be shared by China's National Tibetan Plateau Data Center.

Wu Yirong, head of the CAS Aerospace Information Research Institute, acknowledged that the experiment's VHF radar constitutes the first aerial glacier detection payload independently developed by the institute.

It is also the first time the domestic MA60 remote sensing aircraft has flown above 4,500 meters in a mountainous area.

The experiment is of great significance to the development of glacier detection technology in China and scientific research on global changes, said Gong Jianya, head of the School of Remote Sensing Information Engineering at Wuhan University. He said that it will provide an important reference for the scientific verification of civilian P-band synthetic aperture radar satellites.

The experiment began on March 20 and is scheduled to conclude by mid-May.

XINHUA

Aviation links with Central Asia strengthened

By LUO WANGSHU
luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's civil aviation sector has strengthened cooperation with Central Asian nations, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said.

Last month, regular scheduled flights began operating between Xi'an, capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, and Astana, capital of Kazakhstan. The flight, operated by Air China, runs every Monday and Friday.

From January — when China downgraded its COVID-19 management measures — to this month, the number of flights between Central Asian countries and Xi'an has greatly increased, said Sun Wensheng, deputy head of the CAAC's general department.

According to Sun, the CAAC and the five Central Asian countries are discussing and preparing to sign a memorandum of understanding to jointly develop an "Air Silk Road". They are also working together to create regulations and improve the quality and efficiency of their cooperation in the civil aviation field.

The CAAC is encouraging airlines to open and add more flights between China and Central Asia. Currently, 10 airlines are operating flights between the two regions.

Cooperation has been promoted in the infrastructure development between the two sides, mainly focusing on airport construction and export projects involving civil aviation products and equipment. There are 17 projects involving building new airports and airport expansion.

Cooperation will be promoted in developing civil aviation technology, according to the CAAC.

> Central Asia is known as the heart of Asia and is key for the Belt and Road Initiative."
>
> **Sun Wensheng,** deputy head of the general department of the Civil Aviation Administration of China

"Central Asia is known as the heart of Asia and is key for the Belt and Road Initiative. China has great potential and broad prospects for cooperation in various fields in this region," Sun said.

"The CAAC is playing a strategic supporting role, serving as a bridge in economic, trade and cultural exchanges, and it actively promotes cooperation and exchanges with the five Central Asian countries."

China's civil aviation sector was badly hit by the COVID-19 epidemic. However, the sector is recovering from the virus, with the number of flights returning to about 96 percent of their level before the pandemic began, Li Yong, deputy director of the administration's safety office, told a news conference in Beijing.

Last month, the sector handled 50.2 million passenger trips, a year-on-year increase of 94.6 percent, with the volume of domestic passenger trips increasing by 3.4 percent compared to 2019, he said.

The amount of cargo and mail handled by the civil aviation sector remained stable, registering 545,000 metric tons last month, a year-on-year increase of 29.5 percent.

Comedian criticized over joke involving PLA motto

By CUI JIA
cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

A Chinese stand-up comedian has faced a backlash from netizens and the People's Liberation Army after making a joke about the force's motto.

Soldiers have said they found the joke provocative and insulting, a post from the PLA's Western Theater Command said.

During a talk show held in Beijing by Shanghai Xiaoguo Culture Media Company on Saturday, Li Haoshi, a comedian whose stage name is House, said during his performance that he had adopted two stray dogs that like to run wild and chase squirrels. He said his pets' behavior made him think of "maintain excellent conduct, can fight and win", words that are part of the PLA's motto.

Netizens and the PLA responded strongly on Chinese social media, saying Li's joke was inappropriate.

On Monday evening, the PLA's Western Theater Command published a post on its WeChat account titled "Talk shows like this make PLA soldiers very angry!".

"The PLA soldiers have a very tolerant attitude toward diverse cultures, but we cannot stand for this stupid joke, which is provocative and insulting. We are angry," the post said.

It said that the soldiers are glad to see the public is on their side and strongly condemned Li's actions.

"Comedians should also follow moral standards when telling jokes. There are things that should never be joked about, and they should know that well," Jin Feng, a WeChat user, commented on the post.

Li has hurt the feelings of PLA soldiers and the public, and he should take responsibility for his actions, it added.

Meanwhile, the PLA Daily commented in an editorial on Monday that artists shouldn't create content with vulgar taste and keep testing people's limits simply to attract others' attention. Also, being innovative is never about creating an unhealthy social current.

On Monday afternoon, Li apologized in a post on microblogging platform Sina Weibo.

"I am deeply ashamed for using a very inappropriate metaphor during my performance. I take full responsibility and will stop all shows to reflect on my actions," he said.

Xiaoguo said it will suspend Li from appearing on its talk shows indefinitely.

According to Jimu News, a media outlet based in Hubei province, the culture and tourism bureau of Chaoyang district in Beijing said on Monday that it will investigate the case and impose punishments based on the outcome.

CHINA

Defense ministers' line helps manage China-Japan ties

By WANG XU
wangxu@chinadaily.com.cn

Defense ministers of China and Japan held a conversation through a direct telephone line for the first time as part of a maritime and aerial communication mechanism on Tuesday, China's Ministry of National Defense said.

"On the afternoon of May 16, State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu for the first time held a telephone conversation with Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada via a direct telephone line within the framework of the maritime and air communication mechanism of the defense ministries of the two countries, exchanging views on the defense relations between the two countries," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the ministry, the establishment and use of the direct telephone line is "a practical measure to implement the important consensus of the leaders of the two countries", which will "effectively enrich the communication channels between the defense departments of the two countries", "strengthen the crisis management capabilities of the two sides in sea and air", and "further contribute to maintaining regional peace and stability".

The operation of the line was of significance because 16 years have passed since Beijing and Tokyo agreed on the launch of such a measure.

The talks began in 2007 when China and Japan initially agreed to set up a maritime and aerial communication mechanism to build confidence and prevent unexpected contingencies.

However, the launch of the mechanism then became a long-pending issue as Tokyo continually provoked Beijing over territory and history disputes.

A thaw in bilateral relations in 2018 saw the establishment of the maritime and aerial communication mechanism between the two countries, and as the pillar of that mechanism, the direct telephone line was set up between their defense authorities this March.

US' armed shipments plan to Taiwan opposed

China firmly opposes plans by the United States government to offer arms assistance to Taiwan and its sending of instructors to help train the military on the island, a Defense Ministry spokesman said, adding that it has made solemn representations to the US side.

Some media reported that the US government is planning to provide Taiwan with $500 million worth of arms assistance under what's known as a Presidential Drawdown Authority. Using a drawdown will let the US sidestep the often-lengthy process of contracting and producing weapons. Additionally, the US has recently sent instructors to Taiwan to assist in training soldiers there.

"For some time now, the US has continuously strengthened its military collusion with the Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan, elevating their military ties and upgrading substantive relations, which has shaken the foundation of China-US relations and undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," spokesman Tan Kefei said on Tuesday.

"This is a highly erroneous and dangerous move. We are strongly dissatisfied and firmly oppose it. We have made solemn representations to the US."

The Taiwan question is the core interest of China and an unbreakable red line for China-US relations, Tan said, noting that breaking diplomatic relations, abandoning the Mutual Defense Treaty and withdrawing troops are the premise for the establishment of China-US diplomatic relations and cannot be reversed by anyone.

"We warn the US side to earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the three Sino-US Joint Communiques, to follow through on their commitment of not supporting 'Taiwan independence', and to cease any form of military collusion with Taiwan," Tan said.

"We also warn the DPP authorities and 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces that any attempt to seek independence through collusion with the US or independence through military means is a dead end."

The Chinese People's Liberation Army will continue to strengthen their combat readiness and resolutely crush any form of "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and foreign interference, firmly safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, he added.

When commenting on bilateral security guidelines between the US and the Philippines, Tan said China firmly opposes any country interfering in the South China Sea issue and undermining China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests under the pretext of so-called bilateral treaties.

Under the guidelines, the US said it will come to the Philippines' defense if its armed forces came under attack anywhere in the South China Sea.

"Through the joint efforts of regional countries, the current situation in the South China Sea remains generally stable. The South China Sea should be a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation, rather than a battleground for certain countries to engage in camp confrontation," Tan said.

"China's position on the South China Sea issue has always been consistent and clear. The Chinese military closely monitors relevant developments and will take necessary measures to resolutely defend national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and firmly maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea."

CHINA DAILY

Left foot forward

People perform a dance routine during a cultural festival dedicated to Left Foot Dance in Mouding, Yunnan province, on Tuesday. A special program of the Yi ethnic group, the dance got its name because the moves always begin with the left foot. It was listed as a national intangible heritage in 2008. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Letter backs researcher's proposal on Xinjiang

11 institutes send support to scholar cyberbullied for intended field study

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Eleven Chinese research institutions said in a joint open letter on Tuesday that they are willing to collaborate with researchers focusing on Xinjiang around the world to promote academic research on Xinjiang-related issues.

The open letter came after an Australia-based independent scholar Maureen Huebel was subjected to cyberbullying by anti-China forces since expressing her research plan on Xinjiang recently.

These institutions, from various regions of China and having long been committed to researching Xinjiang-related issues, said that they are willing to share the vast amount of objective information and research results they have accumulated over the years in fields such as history, security, law, politics and ethnicity.

Huebel's plight is not a unique case. Chinese and international scholars conducting objective, impartial and independent research on Xinjiang-related issues have become targets of vilification, said the joint open letter.

Under the guise of "academic research", some "research institutions" and "scholars" outside of China, either out of ideological bias or for their interests, have become producers and disseminators of false information in recent years. They have distorted the facts and manipulated the issues related to Xinjiang, seriously hindering the healthy development of academic research, it said.

All of those acts fully demonstrated that Cold War mentality and politicization of academic research are blurring the boundary between politics and academics, and between facts and fiction, challenging academia's bottom line and dignity, and threatening our common pursuit of facts and truth, it said.

The letter calls for respecting and defending the rights of scholars to conduct independent research and express their views freely. "Only when academics are not held hostage by politics will the truth emerge and shine," it said.

In March, 75-year-old Huebel announced her plan on her Twitter account to travel to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in 2024 to study how the Uygurs have contributed to the substantial growth in Xinjiang's GDP and look at their population growth and explore their happiness and expression through dance.

However, many people started ganging up on her on Twitter after announcing her plan, and some even sent her death threats and accused her of being a propaganda "bot" for China.

Huebel once contacted Adrian Zenz, a German scholar who conducted widely cited studies about Xinjiang that have fueled claims of "genocide", "forced labor" and "human rights abuses", questioned his methodology, and asked him for field research notes and published peer-reviewed journals. Yet, Zenz accused Huebel of being a fake account, resulting in her Twitter account being suspended.

Huebel also tried to get Australian government funding to complete the research through Australian institutions, but she was turned down. She now plans to travel to Xinjiang with her husband, daughter and friends at her own expense.

After learning about her situation, multiple Chinese research institutions of higher education including the Institute for Communication and Borderland Governance of Jinan University in Guangdong province, the Institute of China's Borderland Studies of Zhejiang Normal University in Zhejiang province and the Human Rights Institute School of Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing, separately issued open letters to welcome Huebel's visit and showed their willingness to carry out collaboration with her on relevant research in Xinjiang.

First survey on diversity of fish in West Lake completed

HANGZHOU — Researchers have completed the first background survey of fish diversity in West Lake in the eastern city of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, paving the way for the scientific improvement of the ecological environment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

During the survey, researchers identified 36 fish species in the inland lake — including the crucian carp — belonging to nine families and 28 genera, with the carp family dominating, statistics show.

The survey was conducted between 2021 and 2022, and shed light on the composition of fish species as well as the quantities and weight proportions of different types of fish.

Ding Gaofeng, director of the lake's water body management office, said that the survey aims to improve the protection of the lake's ecology and achieve harmony between humanity and nature.

"Fish are an important component of lake ecosystems. Clarifying fish community structures and the status of resources is a necessary step in investigating the lake's biodiversity, and also a prerequisite for the scientific improvement of the lake's ecology through fish community management," said Rao Lihua, deputy director of the office that led the survey.

Other biodiversity surveys were also completed by researchers from the scenic site management committee in the 2021-2022 period. A total of 238 terrestrial vertebrate species, 250 aquatic organism species, 77 macrofungus species and 1,353 insect species were investigated in the West Lake scenic area, which is a popular tourist attraction.

More migratory birds now travel to West Lake to winter, including spot-billed ducks, egrets and common mergansers. The lake has also seen mandarin ducks, which were once migratory birds, choose to stay and become residents, Rao said, noting that these changes indicate the improvement of the lake's ecological environment.

"Not long ago, locals saw a mother mandarin duck crossing the road with her four ducklings on Beishan Road near the lake, and all the cars stopped to make way for them," Rao said.

In recent years, the management office has implemented a slew of measures to protect and improve the scenic area's biodiversity, including the daily monitoring of aquatic organisms, carrying out ecological regulation and control work, and establishing waterfowl protection areas.

Some of the lake's waters have been fenced off as part of the office's ecological restoration work to bring aquatic plants back to the lake, including submerged plants, forming an underwater forest to provide natural bait for fish and other aquatic animals, and to provide habitats for snails, phytoplankton and benthic animals.

A volunteer team consisting of individuals from all walks of life in Hangzhou has also been established to help protect the lake.

According to Ding, people have been protecting and managing West Lake since ancient times. Currently, the lake's management prioritizes ecological conservation and works in a science-based manner.

Ding noted that the original intention of West Lake's ecological management was to enable citizens and tourists to appreciate the lake's natural beauty and experience happiness in the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature.

In the future, the office will cooperate with other institutions to carry out research on the construction of an artificial intelligence automated identification system for fish, waterfowl and other organisms in the scenic area to continue improving the lake's biodiversity.

The site received more than 2.8 million tourist visits during this year's May Day holiday, which lasted from April 29 to May 3. That figure was up 14.2 percent from the same period in 2019.

In 2011, UNESCO added West Lake to its World Heritage List.

XINHUA

Air Force's August 1st stunt team to pilot J-10C fighters

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

The August 1st Air Demonstration Team, China's best-known aerobatic team, has been equipped with J-10C fighter jets and will fly their new planes at an upcoming exhibition in Malaysia, according to the spokesman for the People's Liberation Army Air Force.

Senior Colonel Xie Peng said on Tuesday that the J-10C is the seventh generation of aircraft used by August 1st pilots. The stunt team is scheduled to use the new jets for performance at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition from May 23 to 27, he added.

Before the J-10C, the August 1st team used the J-10A and J-10S, the twin-seat trainer version of J-10A. The two models had been deployed in the team since 2009.

Like its predecessors in the J-10 family, J-10C is a supersonic, multirole fighter jet developed and built by State-owned aircraft maker Aviation Industry Corp of China. The jet is capable of maintaining short- and medium-range air supremacy and striking ground or sea targets, according to the Air Force.

The J-10C was first shown to the public at a massive parade in July 2017 and started being used on combat patrol duty in April 2018.

It has a smaller radar signature and stronger operational capability than the J-10A and J-10B. Compared with its predecessors, the model is more streamlined, lighter and harder to detect, and uses a more powerful engine.

In addition, the jet has an upgraded version of China's active phased array radar, so it has better detection and multitargeting capacity.

The J-10C has also been armed with the country's newest air-to-air missiles, which have longer ranges.

Wang Yanan, chief editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said that there are two major reasons behind giving J-10Cs to the August 1st team.

The August 1st Air Demonstration Team makes contrails during a training session earlier this month. YU HONGCHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"The first is that the J-10A and J-10S jets used by the team were old. Given that aerobatic planes need to carry out highly difficult maneuvers, their aging processes are usually faster than those of other aircraft. So it will cause higher maintenance cost and greater risk if the old planes continue to be used for stunt performance," he said. "Second, the J-10C has been commissioned to many front combat units so deploying the jet in the August 1st team will allow for aviators' rotation and experience sharing between the team and other fighter jet forces."

Fu Qianshao, an aircraft expert from the PLA Air Force, said that thanks to the upgraded avionics and flight-control systems, the J-10C is easier to fly and is more maneuverable in flight, compared with its predecessors.

"Sending the J-10C to international exhibitions will show its advanced capability and multiple functions to foreign pilots and will attract potential buyers," he said.

August 1st was founded in 1962 as the Chinese military's first air display team and was named after the PLA's founding date. The elite unit has carried out nearly 700 aerobatic shows at home and abroad.

POLICY REVIEW

Ministry aims to improve tourism

Govt document outlines plans to better regulate domestic travel

By LI YINGXUE
liyingxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Under the theme of "Beautiful China, Happy Journey", a launch ceremony will be held in Heshun ancient town in Tengchong, Yunnan province, on Friday to celebrate China Tourism Day.

Throughout the month, 10 major promotional events are being held nationwide to mark the day, including "5.19 at 10,000 meters", during which airlines are offering discounted tickets.

The events are designed to tap into the travel fervor created by the Labor Day holiday earlier this month, but as the recovery of the tourism market gains momentum domestically, there has also been a rise in questionable behavior.

Some companies have been accused of offering unreasonably low-priced tours, while some travelers have complained about tour guides insulting them, or pressuring them to buy things at sites. Such behavior has disrupted the normal market order and has had a negative impact on the overall image of the tourism industry.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a document prior to the Labor Day holiday calling for further regulation of the industry to strengthen overall market governance, protect the rights and interests of tourists, and enhance market confidence.

The notice urged local authorities to take decisive action against frequent illegal business practices, and to curb the rise of unreasonably inexpensive tours and the proliferation of market irregularities.

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Regulating conduct

According to the Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the province received about 35 million tourists during the recent holiday, up nearly 135 percent compared to 2019, and generated tourism revenues of about 35 billion yuan ($5 billion).

Simultaneously, the province has stepped up law enforcement inspections of the tourism market, cracking down on illegal activities. During the holiday, 543 complaints were received, all of which were resolved within 24 hours of being lodged.

"Creating a well-functioning market is essential to ensuring a pleasant experience for tourists and to enabling tour companies to operate effectively," Han Yuanjun, a deputy researcher at the China Tourism Academy, told China Tourism News. "It serves as the fundamental basis for the sustainable development of both the supply and demand sides."

Han said that further regulating the market will play a crucial role in ensuring that the expectations of tourists are met, in improving the overall environment for public travel, and in promoting the development of tourism today.

The notice highlighted the importance of regulating the conduct of travel agencies. It called for standardizing contracts between companies and their clients, establishing smooth channels for returns and refunds, and ensuring safety on tours.

Song Changyao, dean of the tourism management department at Beijing International Studies University, said that as tour organizers and wholesalers of tourist offerings, travel agencies play a vital role in coordinating and facilitating tourism.

"Despite the growing trend of independent travel, travel agencies continue to play an indispensable role, particularly in long-distance travel and catering to the needs of senior travelers," he said.

As tourism continues to recover after optimization of COVID-19 measures, Song said it is very important that agencies not only meet market demands, but also prioritize integrity in their business operations and uphold market order amid the dynamic changes to the sector.

To create an enjoyable travel experience, he suggested that travel agencies ensure they are providing accurate travel information, provide an array of tourist offerings and be more attentive to their clients' needs.

Guidance for guides

In April, the topic "encountering boat assassins at West Lake in Hangzhou" trended on Sina Weibo's hot search, attracting widespread attention.

Boat operators were being accused of exploiting customers at the famous lake in Zhejiang province, charging them the standard fee of 150 yuan for a one-hour boat ride, but only taking them on rides lasting for about half an hour.

In response, the West Lake Water Area Management Office revoked the licenses of three of the operators implicated. The office emphasized the need to intensify regulatory measures and enhance professional ethics and conduct through education and training programs.

Liang Xuesong, vice-president of the Hangzhou Tourism Association, said that although the West Lake case was an isolated incident, its impact affects the overall image of the lake and the cultural tourism sector in Hangzhou.

As tour guides are a vital link in the tourism service chain, directly influencing the travel experiences and satisfaction levels of tourists, the notice also emphasized the importance of enhancing training to elevate the overall competence and quality of the service that guides provide.

It stated that strict regulations regarding the professional conduct of tour guides should be enforced to improve the working environment and required employers, including travel agencies, to strengthen internal management and properly compensate guides for their work.

Song said that tour guides should not only have a deep understanding of the sites where they work, but also have a passion to serve.

To improve service, it is vital that tour guides deepen their professional knowledge, strengthen their training, optimize tour schedules and gain a sense of belonging to the tourism sector to better meet standards, he said.

The Office of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also required local cultural and tourism departments to actively collaborate with market supervision, public security, transportation and other departments to establish a robust mechanism for coordinated regulatory work.

Local tourism associations are encouraged to disclose reference prices for their offerings and to take measures to enhance service. They should also educate tourists to be cautious of offerings that are significantly lower priced than normal in order to promote safe, civilized and rational tourism.

Since the beginning of the year, many cultural and tourism bureau directors have made a name for themselves online as ambassadors for their areas. Their performances in short videos have attracted a considerable number of tourists, not only revitalizing local tourism but also driving the development of regional economies.

Song pointed out that although intensifying efforts in promotional marketing can generate interest, maintaining that interest in the long run requires the existence of a comprehensive range of services.

"Local governments should create shared urban spaces with convenient services such as efficient transportation, clear signage, information centers and consultation services," he said.

Well-designed facilities, such as hotels, restaurants offering unique culinary experiences and convenient transportation hubs should be complemented by theaters, leisure districts and immersive experiential spaces.

The friendliness of local residents and a sense of urban security also contribute significantly to overall tourist satisfaction, Song added.

Policy Digest

Program to overhaul infrastructure in cities

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development will launch a national program later this year to overhaul vital urban infrastructure like bridges, gas pipelines and water supply lines.

The decision was announced by ministry authorities at a meeting in Hefei, capital of Anhui province, on May 11. The ministry has asked cities to learn from pilot programs now running in cities including Hefei and Shanghai, and replicate them.

According to the ministry, the program is an inevitable requirement for building smart, livable and resilient cities. A city's resilience depends on its capacity to ensure the smooth and safe operation of infrastructure in the face of extreme weather and natural disasters.

Teens can get mental help on WeChat now

A psychological helpline set up by the Communist Youth League of China officially launched an online platform on May 12 to provide young people with free mental health counseling services.

The "12355" helpline has developed a WeChat mini-program that allows teenagers to communicate with mental health counselors via video link or text. The platform currently has more than 2,000 counselors ready to help those in need.

The CYLC opened the "12355" helpline in 2006. It provides more than 400,000 psychological and legal consultations to teenagers across the country every year.

National cereal grain self-sufficiency achieved

China has achieved basic self-sufficiency in cereal grains as it maintains steady development of grain production, after a series of bumper harvests for 19 years in a row.

Speaking at a news conference on May 11, Cong Liang, head of the National Food and Strategic Reserves Administration, said the country's staple food self-sufficiency rate is above 100 percent, and the cereal self-sufficiency rate stands above 95 percent.

China has consistently maintained its farmland area in excess of the red line of 120 million hectares, Cong said.

According to Cong, the per capita share of grain stands at about 480 kilograms, higher than the internationally recognized security standard of 400 kg.

Number of registered nurses continues to rise

The total number of registered nurses in China exceeded 5.2 million by the end of last year, with roughly 3.7 registered nurses for per 1,000 people, according to the National Health Commission.

Speaking at a news conference on May 11 before International Nurses Day, which fell on May 12, Xing Ruoqi, deputy head of the department of medical administration at the NHC, said that about 300,000 new nurses have joined the workforce each year over the past decade.

By 2025, China aims to have 5.5 million nurses, and the number of registered nurses per 1,000 people is expected to increase to 3.8. In addition, China wants to increase the number of nurses at primary-level health institutions to 1.2 million by then.

CHINA DAILY-XINHUA

Beijing promoting museums during monthlong event

By LI YINGXUE

As part of China Tourism Day on Friday, 10 research and study routes between museums have been created for museum-goers in Beijing.

According to Guan Zhanxiu, executive director of the Beijing Cultural Heritage Conservation Association, the routes are designed along four cultural themes: ancient capital culture, Red culture, innovation culture and Beijing culture. The routes, which take into account the unique features of each participating museum, will be revealed on Friday.

The launch of the routes is part of Beijing Museum Activity Month, which began on May 1 and will end on June 2.

Under the slogan of "Museum City: Making People's Lives Better," Beijing Museum Activity Month aims to fully leverage the advantages of museums around the capital to demonstrate their charm and appeal, according to Bai Chong, director of the museum department of the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau.

During the monthlong event, nearly 300 exhibitions are being held by a wide array of museums, serving the general public in the Beijing area a cultural feast. This is creating an opportunity for people to immerse themselves in the beauty of the museums and their cultural artifacts, Bai said.

Beijing Museum Activity Month kicked off on May 1 at the China Railway Museum's Dongjiao Branch, and included a three-day Beijing Museum Creative Market as part of the celebration.

On Thursday, which is International Museum Day, the Blue Book of Beijing Museums, which reflects the overall achievements in the development of the city's museums, will be officially released. This publication will showcase the accomplishments of Beijing's regional museums, including their exhibitions and their social education and volunteer programs, Bai said.

The results of the "2022 Annual Selection of Excellent Exhibition Events in Beijing Museums" and the "2022 Annual Selection of Excellent Social Education Cases in Beijing Museums" will also be announced on Thursday.

The newly revamped Beijing Museum Cloud mini-program will also be launched on International Museum Day. The program provides users with detailed and accurate information about museum exhibitions, collections, educational activities and reservation services.

During the month, 10 museums, including the China Railway Museum and the Capital Museum, have decided to extend opening hours for museum-goers who want to visit after work.

On Wednesday, the inaugural Charming Beijing museum volunteer sharing team, which consists of 22 people from 20 museums in the Beijing area, will begin sharing stories about Beijing's rich cultural heritage, drawing inspiration from the remarkable exhibitions and prominent collections of their respective institutions.

On May 10, the 2023 International Symposium of the Think Tank for Beijing Cultural Heritage and Museums Development took place at the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum.

The event, themed "A City as a Museum," invited renowned museologists from Italy, Germany, the United States and elsewhere to give speeches to lend an international perspective to the construction of museums in the capital.

On the same day, the Museums Enter Schools event kicked off at the Jiayuan branch of Beijing No 80 High School, with the aim of enhancing collaboration between museums and schools in Beijing, and facilitating the integration of museum resources into the education system.

Great start to economic recovery in capital

Beijing's gross domestic product rises more than 3 percent in first quarter, thanks to investment and local residents' increased spending

AMAZING BEIJING

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Official figures for the first quarter of this year indicated that the economy of Beijing rebounded positively from the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Active investment, increased consumer spending and many emerging industries are displaying remarkable vitality.

According to the latest statistics, Beijing's GDP increased by 3.1 percent year-on-year to 994.8 billion yuan ($143.6 billion) from January to March. It exceeded the growth rate of the whole of 2022 by 2.4 percentage points — a "hard-won result" described by Zhu Yannan, spokesman for the Beijing Bureau of Statistics.

The service industry of Beijing demonstrated a stronger recovery in the first quarter with an increase of 4.6 percent year-on-year.

Specifically, information and communications, software and information technology service industries achieved an incremental value of 213.5 billion yuan, up 12 percent from 2022. Meanwhile, the incremental value of the financial industry surged 6.1 percent to roughly 207 billion yuan. These two categories contributed 42.3 percent of Beijing's GDP, up 2.3 percentage points.

Workers load goods, including auto parts, construction materials, home appliances, textiles and garments, onto a China-Europe Express freight train, which is to depart Beijing and head toward Moscow, Russia, in mid-March. SUN LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The face-to-face service industry, which was significantly affected by the pandemic, recorded an upturn from negative growth in three major categories during the first three months.

The three categories of accommodation and catering; transportation, warehousing, and postal services; and the culture, sports and entertainment industry, surged 11.6 percent, 6.9 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively, from the corresponding period of 2022.

Though the city's secondary industry declined 6 percent year-on-year, its decrease in industrial incremental value narrowed by 9.3 percentage points compared to the whole of 2022, according to the official statistics.

A total of 26 out of the 37 industries sectors in Beijing have shown improvement with some of the emerging industries displaying remarkable performance.

The data indicated that sectors including specific equipment for semiconductor devices, new energy vehicle manufacturing, and high-speed rail equipment and components manufacturing grew rapidly.

The production of new energy vehicles, environmental pollution prevention equipment and wind turbine generators increased by 120 percent, 44 percent and 36.4 percent, respectively.

Driven by the acceleration of projects in integrated circuits, cloud computing and communication, the investment in high-tech manufacturing and high-tech services in Beijing surged 22 percent and 42.6 percent, respectively, in Q1.

As a whole, fixed asset investment in the city rose 9.6 percent year-on-year.

Along with the improving economy, consumers in the city were more willing to spend in Q1, especially in areas related to health, culture and tourism.

Healthcare spending by Beijing residents climbed roughly 13 percent, leading the way among the eight major categories of consumption. Spending on medicine and medical services rose 79.8 percent and 3.9 percent respectively, while spending on fitness equipment rose by 10.4 percent. At the same time, cultural tourism has stimulated new consumer activity, with cultural and entertainment spending by Beijing residents increasing by 17.5 percent from the same period of 2022, a rise of 15 percentage points.

Group travel and ticket purchases for tourist attractions also increased by 3.6 times and 25.2 percent respectively. In addition, spending on flights, long-distance buses and trains rose 2.7 times, 4.3 times and 5.1 times respectively.

Despite challenges, Zhu said Beijing is well-positioned to continue its positive momentum and maintain steady economic growth throughout the year.

"In the next stage, the development of the national economy will provide a favorable environment for the recovery of the Beijing economy," Zhu said. "The trend of economic recovery and improvement is expected to continue and accelerate."

Digital sector flourishing with impressive results

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Beijing is continuing momentum in developing the digital economy, with the sector contributing more than 40 percent of the city's GDP.

Government data show that the digital economy generated 426.57 billion yuan ($61.57 billion) in industrial incremental value during the first quarter, representing a 7.6 percent increase from the same period of 2022. That accounted for 42.9 percent of the city's GDP, a year-on-year rise of 1.7 percentage points.

In the digital economy, the core industries' incremental value grew 9.1 percent to 255.65 billion yuan, contributing 25.7 percent of the city's GDP, up 1.8 percentage points compared with the same period of 2022.

In particular, the industrial incremental value of information and communications, software and information technology service sectors jumped 12 percent year-on-year to 213.47 billion yuan during the period, contributing 21.5 percent of the city's GDP.

Rich in scientific and technological resources, Beijing is going all out to build itself into an international sci-tech center. The city is an innovation pacesetter and industrial forerunner in China's digitalization progress, said Pan Feng, deputy head of the Beijing Bureau of Economy and Information Technology, at a think tank forum in Beijing in mid-April.

Back in 1999, the city proposed the concept of "digital Beijing". In 2008 and 2022 when Beijing hosted the Summer and Winter Olympic Games respectively, a batch of digital technologies, which were applied to the events, were showcased. In 2012, Beijing initiated a smart city program, spurring the growth of related industries.

Riding the wave of a new round of technological revolution, Beijing ramped up construction of a global digital economy bench mark city two years ago. It issued an implementation plan for advancing the initiative in July 2021 and released regulations to promote the digital economy in November 2022, setting the global digital economy bench mark city as a strategic goal for the city's future development.

As one of the cities that has the most abundant digital economic resources and the most favorable development conditions in the world, Beijing pioneered the development of the digital economy and has taken the lead in the sector. The digital economy has become a major engine to drive the growth of the local economy, Chinese media reported.

Government data show that its industrial incremental value increased to 1.7 trillion yuan in 2022 from 871.9 billion yuan in 2015. Its proportion in the city's GDP expanded from 35.2 percent to 41.6 percent over the past seven years, registering an average annual growth rate of 10.3 percent.

Beijing can develop its core competitiveness in building a global bench mark city for the digital economy, as its core industries such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, IT application innovations, and the industrial internet all rank first nationally in terms of industrial output value, local officials said.

Of the industries, AI and the industrial internet in Beijing are capable of generating more than 100 billion yuan in industrial output value. When it comes to the integrated circuit equipment industry, the city has developed the largest industrial cluster of its kind in the country. Its monthly production capacity of 12-inch silicon wafers ranks first nationally and fifth globally.

Different generations of vehicles of Baidu's Apollo Go autonomous ride-hailing service on display at the Apollo Park in Beijing. KEVIN FRAYER / GETTY IMAGES

As the city government attaches importance to fostering innovative businesses, the competitiveness of such local enterprises has significantly increased.

The city has the largest number of national-level intelligent manufacturing system solution providers in the country.

Eight Beijing-based companies made the latest list of the top 100 digital companies, released by Forbes, accounting for more than half of the Chinese companies on the list.

As Beijing advances its smart city initiative, its "new infrastructure" network is expanding, promoting the integration of new-generation IT and urban infrastructure facilities. During the first quarter, roughly 11.4 percent of the city's expenditure, or 20.04 billion yuan, went to the new infrastructure sector, up 24.2 percent year-on-year.

A high-level autonomous driving demonstration zone was established in September 2020 in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area, also known as Beijing ETown. A variety of driverless vehicles are running on public roads to offer taxi, minibus, shuttle bus, truck, cruiser, sanitation truck, delivery and retail services. To date, Beijing has opened 1,544 kilometers of roads for autonomous vehicle testing and given the green light to more than 600 vehicles from 19 companies.

Thanks to digital technologies and services applied to a wide range of sectors, the Sanlitun commercial area in Beijing was included in the first batch of 12 national demonstration intelligent shopping areas recognized by the Ministry of Commerce.

Beijing is allowing full play to data resources in building a global bench mark city for the digital economy, connecting the industry, value and supply chains and integrating them in creating the digital economy industrial ecosystem, Pan said.

Local govt looks to build on consumer sentiment

By SONG MENGXING
songmengxing@chinadaily.com.cn

With pandemic prevention and control measures optimized in late 2022, Beijing's consumption is recovering and even more vigorous than that of 2019.

According to a news conference held in Beijing on April 27, the city's total market consumption and service consumption in the first quarter increased by 14.7 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively, compared with the same period of 2019.

The major trading areas received 530 million visits in the first three months, a year-on-year rise of more than 10 percent.

Beijing saw three shopping malls, including DT51, open for business and 223,000 square meters of commercial facilities were created in the first quarter. The city plans to offer 23 large commercial facilities covering a combined area of about 2.4 million sq m this year. Of the new projects, some 80 percent are located in districts such as Haidian, Fengtai, Changping and Daxing.

Beijing is expediting development of new business models such as livestreaming e-commerce and cross-border e-commerce. Currently, there are 1,020 tax refund stores in the city, of which seven are cross-border e-commerce experience stores.

Six city-level policies on aspects such as new energy vehicles, secondhand cars and online retailing were released in the first quarter. These drove the sales of green and smart products to reach 740 million yuan ($106.88 million). The city's retail sales of NEVs increased by 36.9 percent year-on-year.

The 2023 Beijing Consumption Season, hosted by the Beijing government, kicked off on Qianmen Street on Feb 28 and will last through to December. Beijing is to conduct 25 citywide symbolic events among the business, travel, culture, sports and technology sectors, through Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei collaboration, and combined action among districts and characteristic business areas.

The events aim to combine international and Chinese trends, create a prosperous consumption atmosphere and better meet customers' diverse, quality and personalized demands, and support the development of Beijing into an international consumption hub.

Beijing plans to speed up the opening of some commercial centers in the districts of Shijingshan and Tongzhou, and improve the quality of key business areas such as Chongwenmen and Wukesong.

Wanda Plaza has planned to hold promotional activities and allow consumers to join in group purchases where they can spend 100 yuan and get a 150-yuan voucher.

This year, the Beijing Bureau of Commerce is co-hosting a festival on the theme of car buying with the Beijing Bureau of Economy and Information Technology and the Chaoyang district government, which will continue to November this year. It involves new car exhibitions and releases, discounts and promotions as well as test-drives.

Beijing has also planned to organize a livestreaming e-commerce shopping festival comprising livestreaming promotions, livestreaming host competitions and talent training. More enterprises will be assisted to expand their online sales channels through "live plus", bringing more goods to consumers.

During the event, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei will cooperate to launch special live activities to increase the promotion of locally characteristic products. Companies are encouraged to independently conduct livestreaming activities characteristic of Beijing and improve the online consumption experience through new live scenes and technologies.

Kangaroo artworks have become an attraction at DT51, a new shopping mall in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Metropolis leads growth of nation's foreign trade

By HAO NAN
haonan@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing made substantial contribution to the growth of national foreign trade in the first quarter of this year, data from the city customs bureau showed.

During the period, imports to and exports from the Chinese capital reached 899.24 billion yuan ($129.9 billion), an increase of 11.6 percent year-on-year.

Beijing Customs said it has implemented 17 measures to promote the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative. It also helped build the city's first innovation service center, which serves the BRI and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, to assist investment and market exploration of Chinese companies in related countries and regions.

In the first quarter, Beijing's trade with BRI-involved countries and regions exceeded 448 billion yuan, accounting for 49.9 percent of its total.

Beijing's customs officials have also worked closely with their counterparts in Tianjin and Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province, to exchange and share information, collaborate and realize mutual assistance in law enforcement.

The officials have set up a quick and convenient customs clearance mechanism for 257 key enterprises in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

In the first quarter, total goods imports and exports in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region grew by 9.3 percent year-on-year to 1.23 trillion yuan, 4.5 percentage points higher than the national growth rate in the sector.

In addition to foreign trade, the capital witnessed robust growth in the financial industry. In the first quarter, the incremental value of the industry reached 207.02 billion yuan, up 6.1 percent year-on-year. Its contribution to the city's GDP reached a record high of 20.8 percent, becoming an important force for the city's high-quality development, according to the Beijing Bureau of Local Financial Regulation and Supervision.

Financial institutions in Beijing have maintained smooth operations. By the end of March, Beijing Stock Exchange had more than 180 listed companies. Over 80 percent of them are small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as companies involved in advanced manufacturing, modern services and strategic emerging industries.

In 2024, Beijing will host the SIBOS — or SWIFT International Banking Operation Seminar — financial services forum, which is a milestone in the opening-up of China's financial sector, said Zhao Weijiu, deputy director of the financial regulation and supervision bureau.

To promote the sustainable and healthy development of the capital's financial industry, Zhao said the bureau has been improving the opening-up level of the industry based on the construction of "two zones" and carried out three main tasks of serving the real economy, preventing and controlling financial risks, and deepening financial reform.

Beijing has been developing a national integrated demonstration zone for greater openness in the services sector. It is also setting up a pilot free trade zone for scientific and technological innovation, opening-up the services sector and the digital economy.

Investment promotion of the two zones exceeded expectations in the first quarter. Statistics from Beijing Investment Promotion Service Center showed that from January to March, the city added more than 3,000 new projects, with total investment exceeding 360 billion yuan.

ADVERTORIAL

COMMENT

Editorials

Club of rich nations should try to cultivate stability, rather than sowing seeds of division

Things have not been going well at home for United States President Joe Biden since he announced his bid for re-election.

His approval rating has seen spectacular nosedives in recent polls, and he is at loggerheads with Republican lawmakers over raising the US debt limit.

Unless a compromise solution can be worked out in time, an impending debt default by the US government may trigger an economic downturn and undermine US credibility as a reliable world leader. It will be a fatal blow to the sitting US president's proud declaration that "America is back" after taking office.

That President Biden has finally decided to proceed with his planned eight-day trip to Asia anyway is not only a show of confidence in the prospect of his Democratic colleagues reaching an agreement with Republicans on the debt issue, but of his eagerness to build and cement what his administration envisages as a critical united front against key US rivals, especially China.

The US president is expected to participate in the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, then visit Papua New Guinea and Australia. And China will be front and center at each of his stops. In Japan, at an enlarged gathering of G7 leaders, which will also feature leaders from the Republic of Korea, Australia, India, Brazil, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Comoros and the Cook Islands, the central topic is expected to be the forming of a united approach to China as a looming security threat. In Papua New Guinea, along with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he plans to meet Pacific Island leaders to both reaffirm the US' commitment to the region and push back against what Washington views as China's increasing influence. At the QUAD meeting in Australia, China and the South China Sea are expected to dominate discussions.

Washington may find in Tokyo a dedicated ally in its ongoing campaign to maneuver a de facto strategic siege of China on the world stage, with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida trying everything possible to bring as many potential partners on board as possible.

But since many of the US' European allies have shown an unwillingness to subscribe to the degree of harshness toward China that Washington and Tokyo covet, the White House has recently borrowed from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen the term of "de-risking" and stated the US isn't after "de-coupling" from China.

Although EU foreign ministers broadly backed a recalibration of the bloc's China policy on Friday, that doesn't mean they want to be a US vassal or a battlefield for China-US strategic competition. As French President Emmanuel Macron said after his China visit, Europe wants its own strategic autonomy.

The Japanese leader expanded his guest list by inviting leaders of several key developing nations in a sign of the G7's outreach to the "Global South". But he should not miss the message from the latest meeting of European and some Asia-Pacific foreign ministers, in which few countries from the region showed a readiness to wholeheartedly join an anti-China club.

Summit stabilizer for Central Asia

The China-Central Asia Summit to be held on Thursday and Friday in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, is expected to give a shot in the arm to regional development under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has evolved to be an international public good and an open platform to promote common development.

The leaders from all five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — are scheduled to attend the summit, which will be chaired by President Xi Jinping.

Last year, China's trade with the five countries reached $70 billion, a historical high, and the region has not only become an important trade partner of China, but also developed into a pillar of the new Eurasia Land Bridge formed by the China-Europe freight train services.

Since he proposed to build a Silk Road Economic Belt during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2013, President Xi has maintained close contacts with the heads of state of the five Central Asian states, outlined the blueprint for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and reached important consensuses on synergizing the development strategies of the Belt and Road Initiative with those of the five Central Asian states.

The upcoming summit will further consolidate the consensus of China and the Central Asian countries on high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, which will extend from infrastructure, energy and agriculture to more high-tech sectors, and financial and services industries that are crucial to realizing sustainable and green development, improving people's livelihoods and maintaining regional peace, unity and stability.

That will help further squeeze the space that external forces can take advantage of to incite unrest in the region, through which they intend to sow seeds of discord or create conditions to implant their puppet regimes.

As Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, in Xi'an, the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, China and the Central Asian countries will take advantage of the meeting to reinvigorate the millennia-old Silk Road and make new and greater contributions to building a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

Over the past decade, thanks to the joint efforts of all participants, the Belt and Road Initiative has delivered tangible benefits to the central Asian countries under the principle of extensive consultation and joint contributions. This has further consolidated the high level of political trust between the two sides.

With the global turmoil intensifying, optimizing the development trajectory of the region will help it maintain and consolidate the conditions conducive to maintaining peace and stability.

Peace efforts need support to bear fruit

With the "meat grinding" military conflict in Ukraine intensifying, efforts to promote peace should be welcomed and supported.

The difficulties in mediating between Moscow and Kyiv are readily apparent, as both sides have adopted seemingly intransigent positions. Nonetheless, China is giving it a go.

As part of its efforts to help find a political solution to the crisis, China's special envoy for Eurasian affairs, Li Hui, is paying visits to Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany and Russia this week, with the aim of learning and communicating the various demands of these key parties.

Contrary to the sly claims of Washington, China has taken a neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as it has friendly and cooperative relations with both countries. It has consistently called for direct talks between the two sides to cease the bloodshed and find a permanent solution to their differences.

Furthermore, China has just successfully mediated reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has initiated broader moves to promote peace and development in the Middle East. That offers a demonstration effect to Kyiv and Moscow that there is a constructive alternative to the mutually destructive path they are on at the moment.

Li's endeavors, aimed at soliciting and sharing the various viewpoints of the parties concerned and identifying points on which constructive communication can take place, will be especially taxing as it coincides with the start of a planned counter-offensive on the battlefield by Ukraine, for which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been rallying more military support in Europe.

Nonetheless, efforts have to be made to end the bloodshed and stabilize the situation. Not just for the benefit of the two belligerents, but for the world as a whole, as the spillover effects are being felt far and wide.

Li's visits demonstrate China's sincerity in trying to promote a political settlement to the crisis. But that is not something that can be realized by its efforts alone. The five nations he is visiting must have a genuine willingness to secure an end to the conflict, and other countries must render their support to the peace efforts.

Given that the conflict is essentially a proxy war the US is waging against Russia, its European allies in particular need to step up to the plate and not act as enablers for Washington to keep fanning the flames of hostilities.

In this regard, it was a positive development that just before Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was due to meet US President Joe Biden on May 12, a Spanish diplomatic source said Sanchez would ask Biden to listen to the opinions of non-NATO members such as China and Brazil on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

It is to be hoped that other countries will add their voices to that of Spain.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District, Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Shi Yu

Opinion Line

Cost of living, education and jobs key to resolving population issues

The central authorities recently stressed the need to improve the fertility support policy system, developing universal care and childcare service systems, reducing families' living and education burdens, and promoting the building of a childbearing friendly society in order to realize balanced population development.

To build a childbearing-friendly society, the country must eliminate various factors that are affecting people's childbearing willingness.

China's population peaked last year, decades earlier than expected, and it is also aging fast as predicted. The size of the population aged 60 and above in China is larger than that in the United States, Japan and the European Union combined. Whether the demographic challenge can be properly addressed will decide the sustainability of the country's development in the foreseeable future.

Although many local governments have revised their regulations to boost childbirths following the call of the central government in 2016, there has been limited success, given that the fertility rate has only increased temporarily for about two years.

For one thing, the country lacks childcare services, particularly for infants aged 3 and below, and it is usually the grandparents that take care of children in many families.

The high cost of housing, the limited quality education resources and pressures of unemployment — the rate of unemployment among young people is around 20 percent lately — are arguably the biggest factors dragging down the fertility rate in the country.

But none of them are easy to resolve, as they are all related to structural issues of the Chinese economy and society — growth model, urban-rural gap and downward pressure caused by multiple factors respectively.

It is clear that the country still has a long way to go before a childbearing-friendly institutional environment is created. As such, it is imperative that the country pays more attention to improving the quality of its labor force to enhance the productivity of its economy, thus hedging against the influences of a shrinking and aging population.

Particularly, the vocational education system needs to be reformed to better adapt to the fast-changing landscape of industries, technologies and society. Also, in the face of some developed economies resorting to decoupling, bullying and blockading tactics in the high-tech sector, more pro-innovation inputs should be diverted toward basic research in science, which is the foundation for breakthroughs in technology and industry that the nation is seeking.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

West's 'academic freedom' only a myth

What Australian scholar Maureen A. Huebel experienced recently is an example of how all talk of academic freedom in the West is just a myth.

Huebel said on her Twitter handle that she planned a trip to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to "study how the Uygurs have contributed to the substantial growth in Xinjiang GDP and look at their population growth", but was bombarded with criticism, with some commenting her account was "fake" and others accusing her of spreading "propaganda".

In fact, her handle was briefly suspended following a complaint by Adrian Zenz, the "scholar" who fabricated "forced labor" lies about Xinjiang. Now her account has been restored but the arguments continue.

Huebel's experience is enough to peel the mask of academic freedom off the face of the West. When Zenz invented "forced labor" lies about Xinjiang, they said he was exercising his "academic freedom" and protected him. But where is this shield of academic freedom when Huebel wants to go there to find the truth for herself? Instead, we see the face of "anti-China propaganda" being fully active now.

Enough debate has taken place about Xinjiang. The local governments in Xinjiang have invited journalists and travelers to visit the place, but a strong political force in the West always tries to prevent anyone from making the trip.

Such bias in the West will harm Xinjiang, as it will stop Xinjiang cotton from being sold in Western countries. Those in the West need to know that such bias will hurt their society even more because it will widen the social divide and blind their own people from having the wisdom to know what's true and what's false.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Economic coercion as American as apple pie

When it comes to "coercion" in international relations, the concept has been invented, and acted on, by the United States.

In 1971, Alexander George, a professor at Stanford University, first proposed the concept of "coercive diplomacy", which was used to summarize US policies towards Laos, Cuba and Vietnam. The core of this concept is that the US uses threats of force, political isolation, economic sanctions and a technological blockade to force other countries to make the changes it desires. Thus it can be seen that the "economic coercion" of the US is an integral part of its "coercive diplomacy".

China is now a major target of the US' "coercive diplomacy", particularly "economic coercion".

The US has already made it clear that it will take advantage of the upcoming G7 summit in Japan from Friday to Sunday to gang up with the other members of the group to form a united front against China. It expected that the G7 nations will roll out "unprecedented" multilateral investment restrictions on China covering almost all high-tech sectors.

In fact, a technological blockade is a common means of "economic coercion" by the US under the disguise of protecting its "national security".

In addition, unilateral sanctions are also a means of "economic coercion" of the US. Washington is good at concocting all kinds of excuses to do that. So far it has put more than 1,000 Chinese entities on its sanctions lists. And globally, the US had imposed about 9,400 unilateral economic sanctions on nearly 40 countries and regions by the end of 2021, affecting nearly half of the world's population and resulting in massive humanitarian disasters in many places.

Even the US' allies are not immune to its "economic coercion". Companies, such as Toshiba of Japan, Siemens of Germany and Alstom of France, have all been suppressed by the US without exception when they outcompete US companies in their respective fields. Since the 1980s, the US has repeatedly imposed economic sanctions on Japan, suppressing Japan's competitive industries such as semiconductors by any means, and even pushing for major structural surgery on the Japanese economy, which can be described as textbook "economic coercion".

The Inflation Reduction Act of the US, which authorizes the US government to provide unfair subsidies and tax credits to support locally produced clean energy products, distorts the market law and is another attempt of the US' "economic coercion" that harms the interests of the rest of the world, particularly the other G7 members, which are leaders in the green economy.

If the US wants the G7 group to talk about how to respond to "economic coercion", it must first explain its own track record in this regard.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

VIEWS

Parviz Muhammadzoda

Tajik-Sino ties set to get a boost

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Tajikistan as well as the 10th anniversary of the inking of the Sino-Tajik strategic partnership agreement, which forms the foundation of bilateral relations.

The year also marks the 10th anniversary of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which also helps build a community with a shared future for mankind.

During the past three decades, the Tajik-Chinese relationship has made significant achievements in various areas. Tajikistan and China are good neighbors and close partners which support each other in difficult times. Tajikistan attaches great importance to the increasing cooperation with China. In fact, deepening relations with China is a priority of Tajikistan's foreign policy, as Tajikistan considers China as a reliable strategic partner in the international arena.

Amid the complex global situation, and increasing global and regional challenges and threats, the importance of Tajik-Chinese relations has been increasing. Tajikistan considers China as a friend and sincere partner, and it is glad to get China's support for its sustainable development.

Internationally, China has great influence, participates in political and economic affairs, and plays a constructive role in maintaining global stability and security. As such, Tajikistan welcomes China's Global Security Initiative and is ready to conduct exchanges and cooperation with the Chinese side within the framework of the initiative.

Over the past three decades, a lot of practical experiences and significant achievements have been accumulated by both sides in terms of trade and cooperation. The high-level cooperation between Tajikistan and China allows them to implement the agreements they have reached in various fields.

The friendship and understanding between our two countries strengthened during the course of jointly combating the novel coronavirus pandemic, especially because China donated 8.3 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Tajikistan.

Cooperation between the two countries is based on a solid political and economic foundation, and therefore it can promote mutually beneficial development in all spheres, which is not only in the long-term national interests of both sides but also will contribute to the stability and security of the region. In addition, it will strengthen bilateral relations in political, trade, economics, security and other areas of mutual interest.

Besides, with the strengthening of Tajik-Sino ties at multiple levels, cultural and humanitarian relations between the two sides will gain even more importance.

Tajikistan was one of the first countries to support the Belt and Road Initiative and participate in the initiative. The two sides also have agreed to integrate the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative with Tajikistan's National Development Strategy up to 2030 in order to achieve common prosperity.

Tajikistan also supports the China-proposed Global Development Initiative, and is ready to cooperate with China in implementing it with its development programs, which will help boost Tajikistan's green and digital economy.

China is also a leading investor in Tajikistan, accounting for more than 40 percent of the total foreign investment in the Tajik economy. Dozens of important goals in different fields have been set by the two countries, including in the fields of energy, highways, industries and agriculture.

In the 31 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, and in 10 years since inking the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, Tajikistan and China have made many remarkable bilateral achievements, thanks to the frequent meetings and discussions between them at various levels. As a matter of fact, under the wise and visionary leadership of the two heads of state, Sino-Tajik relations have blossomed and become a template for ideal bilateral relations.

Tajikistan attaches great importance to strengthening cooperation with China under the frameworks of the United Nations, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as under the Central Asia-China mechanism. As such, Tajikistan welcomes and is looking forward to the upcoming Central Asia-China Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province of China.

Tajikistan is also preparing for the upcoming visit of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to China, when a number of political documents and trade and investment agreements are likely to be signed by the two sides. And we are confident that Rahmon's visit will inject new impetus into the Tajik-Chinese comprehensive strategic partnership.

One of the most important areas of Sino-Tajik friendship and partnership is cooperation between the two countries' scientific and analytical centers. Due to the Tajik president's initiative, the Center for Strategic Research, the leading Tajik research institute, has established close ties with many leading think tanks of China.

We are confident that scientific and fruitful cooperation between the two countries' research institutes will help strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation and friendship between people of the two countries, and take bilateral ties to an even higher level.

The author is deputy director of the Center for Strategic Research under the president of the Republic of Tajikistan. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Yang Bojiang

Japan must not use G7 summit to gain own ends

Japan will host the Group of Seven Summit in Hiroshima from Friday to Sunday and will include the decisions taken at the various ministerial meetings it has held since April in the G7 Summit declaration.

The visits of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa to various countries in recent months, along with Tokyo's invitation to the heads of state or government of the Republic of Korea, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, the Cook Islands, the Comoros and Brazil to visit Japan, reflect the country's intention to create the "right" atmosphere for the G7 Summit.

But the fact is that Japan's activities leading up to the summit could create instability in the Asia-Pacific region. Reportedly the G7 nations may discuss ways to impose more sanctions on Russia, provide more assistance for Ukraine and make the semiconductor and rare earth supply chains more efficient.

And many of the issues to be discussed may be directly or indirectly related to China. For example, the G7 countries may continue to hype up the "China threat" theory with an eye to promote the United States' "Indo-Pacific" strategy. They are also likely to attach greater importance to China's activities in the South and East China seas in a bid to highlight the risk of a conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Japan has made "Indo-Pacific" security and economic security separate issues for the first time at the summit, reflecting its intention of helping the US expand its "Indo-Pacific" strategy to contain China's peaceful rise.

Besides, leaders of the US, Japan and the ROK are likely to hold a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G7 Summit to discuss economic security issues including how to diversify the cutting-edge semiconductor supply chains.

It is clear that Japan is eager to take advantage of its G7 presidency to strengthen cohesion among member states and promote the so-called rules-based international order. It also hopes to act as a bridge between the West and the Global South in a bid to encourage developing countries to join the West in targeting Russia and China. By doing so, Japan hopes to strengthen the US-led alliances in Europe and Asia and enhance its status in the US global strategy.

In fact, Japan plans to adopt a more aggressive security strategy by talking of the "Eastern Asia dilemma" and encouraging external forces to intervene in regional issues.

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out in February 2022, Japan has followed the US' lead in comparing the fundamentally different Taiwan question with the Ukraine crisis, saying "Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow". Japan has also conducted naval operations in the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China seas, saying it is opposed to the use of force to change the status quo across the Strait.

Japan keeps criticizing China's attempts to explore and exploit natural resources in the East China Sea, has labeled China a rule breaker in the South China Sea, and launched the 2+2 dialogue mechanism to stir up trouble in the South China Sea.

Worse, it has been promoting security cooperation with Taiwan, helping Taiwan to improve its position in the global supply chains, and making it difficult for Beijing to resolve the Taiwan question through peaceful means.

Some media reports suggest the G7 Summit will issue a statement emphasizing the rules-based world order. But by doing so, the G7 countries will only expose their hypocrisy, because history shows both the US and Japan have been breaking international rules for years at will.

For example, China, the US and 24 other countries signed the United Nations Declaration in 1942 accepting the Atlantic Charter and agreeing not to negotiate a separate peace treaty with any of the Axis powers. But 49 countries, including the US, inked the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 without China's participation, establishing Japan's position in the world order and declaring that the legal status of the Chinese island of Taiwan was temporarily undetermined.

The fact is that the Potsdam Declaration of 1945 made it clear that "Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, and such minor islands as we determine", as had been declared by the Cairo Declaration of 1943. Later, in 1945, the Instrument of Surrender of Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and the Cairo Declaration, which specifically says Taiwan and Penghu should be returned to China.

In 1971, a backroom deal was signed between Washington and Tokyo in the absence of Beijing. And while the agreement required the US to give the "administration" of Okinawa to Japan, the document integrated the Diaoyu Islands — a Chinese territory which is part of Taiwan — into Okinawa.

About four decades later, in 2003, the US-led coalition forces invaded Iraq without the UN Security Council's sanction. And Colin Powell, then US secretary of state, presented false evidence to the UN Security Council to claim Saddam Hussein had stockpiled weapons of mass destruction. Obviously, no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. Instead, the US-led invasion caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians and left the country in tatters. Not surprisingly, during the war, Japan Self-Defense Forces' ships provided fuel and logistics services for the coalition forces till 2009.

For the overwhelming majority of countries, international rules consist of the basic norms of international relations based on the principles of the UN Charter, which all countries must abide by. But for the G7 countries, international rules mean the G7's rules which serve the vested interests of the rich countries, rather than the common interests of the international community.

The first thing the US and Japan should do as G7 members is to pay their arrears to the UN, with the US withdrawing its troops illegally occupying parts of Syria and Japan announcing it will not dump nuclear-contaminated water from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea. The two countries should also stop triggering divisions and confrontations, or violating international rules to fulfill their own narrow goals.

The author is director-general of the Institute of Japanese Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Li Kun and Wei Hao

Yuan meets all criteria to be a cross-border trade currency

In his report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China last year, CPC Central Committee General Secretary Xi Jinping said China will promote the internationalization of the yuan in an orderly way, especially by increasingly using it to settle cross-border trade payments.

Cross-border trade settlement in the yuan has been increasing at a rapid pace since 2015 thanks to the emergence of new trade models and acceleration of the yuan's internationalization process.

China has signed agreements with a number of countries for settling trade payments in the yuan. For example, China and Brazil agreed in March to use their own currencies, instead of the US dollar, for trade settlement, with the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, signing a memorandum of cooperation with the Central Bank of Brazil to this effect.

Cross-border trade settlement in the yuan has seen rapid growth over the past years, with China inking agreements with Russia, Venezuela, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on the subject from 2016 to 2022. While the PBOC has signed bilateral currency swap agreements with more than 40 countries and regions, with a total value of more than 4 trillion yuan ($582.3 billion), the government has authorized 31 yuan-clearing banks in 29 countries and regions to conduct trade in the Chinese currency.

Cross-border trade settlement in the yuan enjoys institutional guarantee, and infrastructure and technological support from the Chinese government, with the central bank issuing a circular last year to promote the yuan's use to settle foreign trade payments in a bid to ensure it better serves the real economy and increases trade and investment.

Also, the US has been using the dollar as a financial weapon to impose sanctions on other countries and regions, dealing a blow to the international financial system.

China also launched the Yuan Cross-border Interbank Payment System, or CIPS, in 2015 in order to build a stable financial infrastructure and a service platform for cross-border yuan settlement. With the aim of reducing transaction costs and processing time, the CIPS has made the yuan's use more efficient and promoted its internationalization. As of February 2023, the CIPS had 1,366 participants — 79 direct participants and 1,287 indirect participants — from 109 countries and regions.

There is a need to promote cross-border yuan settlement to make bilateral trade more efficient and boost the yuan's internationalization process. For example, China was the biggest trading partner of Brazil from 2009 to 2022, and since 2018, bilateral trade has exceeded $100 billion for five consecutive years, reaching $171.49 billion in 2022, an increase of 4.9 percent over 2021. Given that China is the biggest investor in Brazil's energy, minerals, agriculture, infrastructure and manufacturing sectors, the CIPS offers the two sides an alternative to the US dollar to settle trade payments to boost their trade.

The development of the CIPS can hasten the internationalization of the yuan, because if a country mostly conducts foreign trade in its own currency, its currency can become a fully convertible international currency more expeditiously.

According to the General Administration of Customs, China's foreign trade in goods was 42.07 trillion yuan in 2022. Reportedly the yuan's share in global trade financing has risen from less than 2 percent in 2017 to 4.5 percent in 2023. The fact implies that the CIPS will deepen the financial cooperation between China and the rest of the world, and expand the global influence of the Chinese currency.

To be sure, cross-border trade settlement in the yuan will reduce many countries' dependence on the US dollar. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on April 13, during his visit to China, that BRICS member states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) should conduct trade in their own currencies.

As a matter of fact, India and Malaysia agreed on April 1 to settle bilateral trade in Indian rupees. And in the ASEAN Financial Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in March, member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed to promote the use of their currencies in intra-ASEAN trade in a bid to reduce their reliance on the dollar.

The rising "de-dollarization" trend in many parts of the world is a response to the decreasing global influence of the US and its currency — the United States' share of global GDP, based on purchasing power parity, declined from 22.13 percent in 1986 to 15.57 percent in 2022.

Besides, the US Federal Reserve's years-long loose monetary policy has led to record inflation in the US, lowered investors' expectations from US assets, and prompted many countries to look for other currencies to settle foreign trade payments. According to the International Monetary Fund, the dollar's share of international reserve dropped from 71 percent in 1999 to about 58.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022. Hence, China should continue to expand the CIPS to help reduce its trading partners' dependence on the greenback.

Also, the US has been using the dollar as a financial weapon to impose sanctions on other countries and regions, dealing a blow to the international financial system. For example, sanctions imposed on Moscow after the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out have negatively affected emerging economies, even some of the US allies. Therefore, it makes sense for countries to trade in the yuan or other currencies to shield against the "weaponized dollar".

Moreover, the CIPS will also help boost small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the backbone of cross-border e-commerce and need more support from the government to hedge exchange rate risks. And the improvement in cross-border transactions will help improve the financial environment for the SMEs, traditional trade and new trade models, boost the development of foreign trading companies and develop new growth points.

Li Kun is an associate professor at the Business School of Beijing Normal University, and Wei Hao is dean of the Department of International Economy and Trade at the Business School of Beijing Normal University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Editor's note: *Despite a violation of child labor laws, businesses in some US states are attempting to fill vacant jobs with minors because of a national labor shortage. This page takes a closer look at how children have been able to secure jobs that are permitted only for adults.*

US sees sharp rise in child labor violations

Media reports show underage migrants, mostly from Central America, doing dangerous jobs, while some states pass legislation allowing minors to work to ease staff crunch

A migrant boy traveling with his family to reach the United States to seek asylum is seen trying to cross the border in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on Saturday. JOSE LUIS GONZALEZ / REUTERS

By AI HEPING in New York
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

They worked shifts at 13 meatpacking companies in eight US states. They used caustic chemicals to clean razor-sharp saws as well as blood and animal parts off the floor by night and went to school by day.

In February, the Labor Department found that Packers Sanitation Services Inc — known as PSSI and owned by the Blackstone Group in New York, the world's largest private equity company — employed at least 102 underage children at slaughterhouses. It fined PSSI $1.5 million in civil penalties — $15,138 for each child, the maximum penalty under federal law. The company denied knowingly using child labor.

Last year, there were 835 child labor violation cases in the United States involving 3,876 children. The number of minors illegally employed in fiscal year 2022 was 37 percent higher than in fiscal year 2021, and 283 percent higher than in fiscal year 2015.

While child labor laws are being increasingly violated, lawmakers and business groups in at least 11 states have sought to loosen those laws to help employers fill empty jobs because of labor shortages.

The unemployment rate in the US dipped to 3.4 percent last month, a 54-year low, the Labor Department said on May 5. The jobless rate fell in part, though, because 43,000 people left the labor force, the first drop since November, and were no longer counted as unemployed. Businesses of all types, from factories to restaurants to retail stores, are struggling to find workers.

Opponents of bills to loosen the labor rules for children say they are an attempt to roll back child labor protections that are nearly a century old.

The legislative push also comes amid a sharp increase in the number of unaccompanied migrant children, largely from Central America, arriving in the US and engaging in dangerous occupations, according to an investigation by The New York Times.

The number climbed to 130,000 last year — three times what it was five years earlier — and this summer is expected to bring another wave. The children are driven by an economic desperation worsened by the pandemic.

In February, the investigation by the Times showed a "shadow workforce" of migrant children "across industries in every state", doing dangerous jobs that violate existing child labor protections.

The Times said at least 12 underage migrant workers have been killed on the job since 2017, including a 16-year-old who fell from and was crushed by an earthmover he was driving in Georgia. Others have been seriously injured, losing legs and shattering their backs in falls.

The newspaper found products made with underage child labor in the US supply chains of major brands and retailers, including Ben & Jerry's, Fruit of the Loom, Ford, General Motors, J. Crew, Walmart, Whole Foods and Target.

In Los Angeles, children stitch "Made in America" tags into J. Crew shirts; they bake dinner rolls sold at Walmart and Target, process milk used in Ben & Jerry's ice cream and help debone chicken sold at Whole Foods; in Michigan, children make auto parts used by Ford and General Motors, the Times reported.

Last summer, Reuters revealed that children as young as 12, many of whom were migrants, were hired to work in a metal shop owned by Hyundai.

Federal law bars minors from a long list of dangerous jobs, including roofing, meat processing and commercial baking. Except on farms, children younger than 16 are not supposed to work for more than three hours or after 7 pm on school days.

When the Labor Department discovered violations, it focused on outside contractors and staffing agencies that usually employ the children rather than the companies where they work, and the companies have avoided fines.

Some state legislators, most of them Republicans, see minors as a partial solution to the labor shortage. Supporters of legislation to allow minors to work more jobs and more hours say it fills an economic need and can teach them responsibility and financial literacy.

In Ohio, state senators approved a bill that would allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 9 pm any time of the year if they have permission from their legal guardian. Current law prohibits children under the age of 16 from working between those hours during the school year.

Limitations scrapped

In Minnesota, a proposal would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to work on construction sites. A new Arkansas law removes a requirement that children under 16 provide proof of parental consent to work. A Tennessee law scraps the prohibition on 16- and 17-year-olds working in restaurants that derive more than one-fourth of their revenue from alcohol.

"Eliminating work opportunities for youth just because of their age will make it even harder for businesses to find reliable employees," Republican state Senator Rich Draheim, sponsor of the Minnesota bill, said in a statement. "Businesses teach these youth workers skills that will prepare them for their future — and maybe even attract them to their industry for life."

Dale Carr, Republican state representative in Tennessee, said in a February hearing on the legislation, "We're desperately needing some extra workers between the ages of 16 and 17 to work at some of these restaurants."

Republican state Senator Ed Jackson, who sponsored the bill in the Tennessee Senate, said the goal was "to try to address staffing problems in the hospitality industry" and to "encourage Tennesseans to enter the workforce at a younger age to gain valuable experience".

Supporters of the state bills include national and state branches of the National Federation of Independent Business, the Chamber of Commerce and the National Restaurant Association, as well as lodging and tourism associations, homebuilders and Americans for Prosperity, a conservative political advocacy group in Virginia, said a report from the Economic Policy Institute in Washington.

"Attempts to weaken state-level child labor standards are part of a coordinated campaign backed by industry groups intent on eventually diluting federal standards that cover the whole country," the report said.

Jessica Dunker, president and CEO of the Iowa Restaurant Association, said the legislation in her state is designed to open more work opportunities for students who want, or need, to earn extra money.

Dunker said her group is most interested in provisions that would allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work later on school nights; allow some underage workers to obtain a driver's license to drive to and from a job; and allow 16- and 17-year-olds to take and deliver alcohol orders at restaurants.

At the start of the pandemic, the Iowa restaurant industry laid off about half its workforce, Dunker said. Since then, "we were never able to recoup our workforce", she added.

"This is a youth employment bill," she said. "There isn't a youth job in the state that isn't at least $10 an hour, and most are $15."

Children have crossed the southern border on their own for decades, and since 2008 the US has allowed non-Mexican minors to live with sponsors while they go through immigration proceedings, which can take several years.

In the past two years, more than 250,000 children have entered the US by themselves.

Parents know that they would be turned away at the border or quickly deported, so they send their children in hopes they will find work and the money they earn will come back. Many pay rent and living expenses to their sponsors.

Most children are sent to relatives, acquaintances or even strangers, a Times analysis of federal data showed. Nearly half are coming from Guatemala, where poverty is fueling a wave of migration.

Sponsors are required to send migrant children to school, and some students juggle classes and heavy workloads.

The Health and Human Services Department, or HHS, is responsible for ensuring that sponsors will support them and protect them from trafficking or exploitation.

While the agency checks on all minors by calling them a month after they start living with their sponsors, the Times said data it obtained showed that over the past two years the agency could not reach more than 85,000 children and it had lost immediate contact with one-third of migrant children.

The HHS wanted to release children swiftly for the sake of their well-being, but had not compromised safety, said Kamara Jones, a spokeswoman at the agency.

"There are numerous places along the process to continually ensure that a placement is in the best interest of the child," she told the Times.

The federal government hires child welfare agencies to track some minors who are deemed to be at high risk. But caseworkers at those agencies told the Times that the HHS regularly ignored obvious signs of labor exploitation, which the agency disputed.

The Labor Department is supposed to find and punish child labor violations, but inspectors in a dozen states told the Times their understaffed offices could barely respond to complaints, let alone open new investigations.

"As the government, we've turned a blind eye to their trafficking," said Doug Gilmer, head of the Birmingham, Alabama, office of Homeland Security Investigations, a federal agency that often becomes involved with immigration cases.

In Congress, legislation to crack down on use of child labor by companies has little Republican backing. Democrats' efforts to increase funding for federal agencies to provide more support services to migrant children who cross the border by themselves are being thwarted by the Republican-controlled House, where Republicans have pledged to slash agency budgets.

"This is a crisis made worse by President (Joe) Biden's open-border agenda," Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, a Washington Republican and the chairwoman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, said last month.

'Indentured servitude'

At a Senate Judiciary Committee oversight hearing last month, Senator Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, berated Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on the issue, suggesting it should cost him his job.

"You have at every stage facilitated this modern-day indentured servitude of children," Hawley said. "Why should you not be impeached for this?"

Since the Times' investigation, the Biden administration has taken steps to change some of its policies and practices.

The HHS has designated a team to support children after they leave government shelters and is providing more children with case management and legal services.

Homeland Security has also widened its investigation into how underage migrant children have secured dangerous jobs that are legal only for US adults by presenting identification documents stolen from US citizens.

Agencies contributed to this story.

3,876 children
were involved in 835 child labor violation cases in the United States last year.

$15,138 fined
for each child on Packers Sanitation Services Inc, which employed underage children.

A mother stands with her 4-year-old daughter while being stuck in a makeshift camp between US-Mexico border walls in San Diego, California, on Saturday. MARIO TAMA / GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

A US border patrol begins processing a group of migrant families near San Diego, California, on Thursday. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Iowa to roll back curbs on hiring young people

Republican Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds says she will sign a bill to roll back labor protections for children, allowing minors to work longer hours and take jobs that had been prohibited.

The bill lifts "unnecessary restrictions" on young people who wish to work and creates new work opportunities for them "to get ahead in life or save money for college", Reynolds said in a statement to The Washington Post.

"Iowans are proud to be known for our strong work ethic, and we want to instill those same values in the next generation," she said.

The bill would allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 9 pm any time of the year if they have permission from a legal guardian. Existing law prohibits children under 16 from working late during the school year.

The legislation also eliminates state regulations on the number of hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work and allows them to serve alcohol in restaurants, with parental permission.

Children under 16 will still be limited to working no more than three hours a day on a school day and no more than 18 hours a week during the school year.

However, the measures permit children as young as 14 to work in roofing, construction and demolition, provided they are part of educational or apprenticeship programs and a guardian has granted permission. They will also be allowed to do light assembly work and assist customers in businesses that sell fireworks, provided no machines are present.

In the state Senate, two Republicans joined Democrats in opposing the bill. The legislation has the support of conservative lobbying groups, the state restaurant association, and the state industry group for home builders, among others.

Debbie Berkowitz, a fellow in the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University in Washington, described the Iowa legislation as "the most anti-child, anti-family bill that I've seen" regarding child labor.

"This law is an ideological solution when there is no problem," she said.

AI HEPING

WORLD

Private sector investment key to Asia infrastructure

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
kelly@chinadailyapac.com

Governments in Asia must create a more conducive environment to encourage private sector investment in infrastructure construction, according to experts, who advocate an innovative financing mechanism.

Such a mechanism requires further collaboration between the public and private sectors to enhance partnerships, said Sithanonxay Suvannaphakdy, former lead researcher in economic affairs for the ASEAN Studies Centre at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

"Greater public-private partnerships should reduce pressure on regional governments, which have experienced severe budget deficits due to large pandemic-related expenditures in the past three years," he said, adding that regional authorities should create a conducive business and investment climate.

On May 2, the Asian Development Bank, in partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Plus Three finance ministers and central bank governors, released a report entitled "Reinvigorating Financing Approaches for Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure in ASEAN+3".

ASEAN+3 refers to the 10-member Southeast Asian nations' bloc plus China, Japan and South Korea.

According to the report, developing Asia will require a $13.8 trillion investment in infrastructure from 2023 to 2030 to sustain economic growth, reduce poverty, and respond to climate change. Over the same period, the infrastructure investment needed for ASEAN economies is estimated to be at least $2.8 trillion.

Climate loans

The bank also launched the Innovative Finance Facility for Climate in Asia and the Pacific, which could create up to $15 billion in new loans.

As it comes to the end of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, there is some realization that things have not gone according to the plan, and the call for more private sector participation is nothing new, said Ruth Banomyong, professor of international business, logistics and transport at Thammasat University in Thailand.

Echoing that view, Watcharas Leelawath, honorary adviser at Bolliger and Co, a public policy and strategic consulting firm in Thailand, said there should be a clear method to provide private entities with the necessary information that they need when investing in projects, including those related to future returns.

"The private sector has increasingly played an important role as an engine of economic growth and job creation," said Thong Mengdavid, a research fellow at the Phnom Penh-based Asian Vision Institute.

Ky Sereyvath, director-general of the Institute of China Studies at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said it is important for regional governments to ensure funding transparency and accountability when it comes to infrastructure projects.

Cyclone aftermath

Residents stand on a broken bridge in Sittwe, Myanmar, on Monday after Cyclone Mocha made landfall. The death toll in cyclone-hit Myanmar rose to 60 on Tuesday after the cyclonic storm swept into the country on Sunday, Agence France-Presse reported. SAI AUNG MAIN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's envoy pushes for peace on Ukraine

All parties urged to create conditions for talks rather than fanning flames

By MINLU ZHANG
at the United Nations
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

China's top envoy to the United Nations has urged the international community to promote a political solution to the Ukraine crisis, noting that everything China has been doing is to facilitate peace talks.

A political solution to the Ukraine crisis must be promoted with the utmost urgency, Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, told a Security Council meeting on Monday on the maintenance of peace and security in Ukraine.

"There are no easy answers to complex issues, and the first step must always be taken to comprehensively solve them," said Zhang. "The restart of dialogue and negotiation cannot wait any longer. All parties should create conditions for promoting dialogue and negotiation instead of adding fuel to the flames, intensifying conflicts and trying to profit from it.

"China has always stood on the side of peace on the Ukraine issue, and everything we do is to promote peace and talks," he added.

Zhang said all efforts must be made to alleviate the harm and suffering of civilians. He said international humanitarian law sets out the rules of conduct that must be observed in conflict situations.

"We welcome the international community, including humanitarian agencies, to expand assistance to all affected people and advance the restoration of civilian infrastructure on the basis of the principles of neutrality and impartiality," he said.

China supports the balanced, comprehensive and effective implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the memorandum of understanding on promoting Russian food products and fertilizers to the world. China supports the UN in playing an important role in eliminating the practical obstacles to Russia's grain and fertilizer exports, said Zhang.

UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said on Monday that efforts will continue in the coming days to extend a deal allowing for safe Black Sea grain exports.

Zhang reiterated that a nuclear war must never be fought and cannot be won, adding that the security of nuclear power facilities in Ukraine is related to the safety and well-being of hundreds of millions of people, and any accident may have immeasurable humanitarian and ecological consequences.

"We must keep the red line of nuclear safety," said Zhang.

Sanctions denounced

Round after round of unilateral sanctions and the extension of the "long-arm jurisdiction" have not only "caused serious humanitarian consequences but also disrupted global industrial and supply chains", Zhang said.

"The US and other relevant countries should seriously reflect on it, make immediate reforms, and create conditions for developing countries to develop their economies and improve their people's livelihoods," said Zhang. "They should not engage in economic coercion while fabricating narratives that accuse other countries of engaging in economic coercion.

"Unilateral sanctions have no basis in international law and are causing resentment and opposition from more and more countries," he said, adding that the so-called rules-based international order has "serious problems in law and practice".

Li Hui, special representative of the Chinese government on Eurasian affairs, is visiting Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany and Russia for communication, with the aim to promote a political settlement to the Ukraine crisis, said China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

Meanwhile, European leaders were traveling to Iceland on Tuesday for a two-day summit. In only the fourth summit of the Council of Europe since its founding after World War II, the 46-member body was expected to gather to discuss the conflict in Ukraine.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Tuesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky had agreed to receive a group of African leaders to discuss a potential peace plan for the conflict.

"My discussions with the two leaders demonstrated that they are both ready to receive the African leaders and to have a discussion on how this conflict can be brought to an end," Ramaphosa told a joint news briefing with the Singaporean prime minister in Cape Town.

On the battlefield, Russia's Defense Ministry said for the first time on Monday that it had downed a long-range Storm Shadow missile supplied to Ukraine by the United Kingdom.

Zelensky has reached agreements with the leaders of Italy, Germany, France and Britain on providing fresh defense aid, Zelensky's press service reported on Monday after the president visited four European countries.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

Kazakhstan vows to tap into potential in C. Asia

By REN QI in Almaty, Kazakhstan
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Kazakhstan is undergoing a systemic transformation for a stronger and more diversified economy, and is looking for financial and economic cooperation with other countries, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said on Monday.

Making the remarks at the 46th annual meeting of the Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific, or ADFIAP, in Almaty, Tokayev said that the country's vast potential lies in sectors such as agriculture, petrochemistry, metallurgy, manufacturing, textiles, transportation, logistics, finance and tourism. "Our investment policy is continuously evolving to ensure that Kazakhstan remains the most attractive investment destination in Central Asia," he said.

Last year, Kazakhstan attracted $28 billion in foreign direct investment, a record high over a decade.

Tokayev said the ADFIAP will prompt investment cooperation across Asia-Pacific and promote investment cooperation among Kazakhstan and its partners from the region.

The forum of investors from 40 countries lasted two days. Hosted by the Eurasian Development Bank, the ADFIAP attracted over 240 delegates from major banks, investment funds, and development institutions from China, Turkiye, Japan, India, the European Union, the United States and other countries and regions.

Mominul Islam, ADFIAP vice-chairman and CEO at IPDC Finance in Bangladesh, said the organization together with its annual meetings serves as a platform for discussing new joint projects aimed at achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and those outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement.

Nikolai Podguzov, chairman of the Eurasian Development Bank management board, said this year's forum agenda focused on the role of national and international development in transportation, communications, energy and digitalization.

"The lack of access to the sea constrains the trade and economic potential of Central Asia. Due to high transportation costs, the GDP of landlocked countries is growing on average 20 percent slower than it could," said Podguzov. He called on global businesses to step up concerted action to mitigate these risks.

New rail routes

To address this issue, the EDB chairman proposed an expansion of the region's transportation infrastructure in all directions. "New rail routes and container traffic could foster more effective integration into global supply chains and reduce transportation costs. For this reason, Central Asia still needs foreign investment in this sector," he added.

Yerbolat Dosayev, mayor of Almaty, emphasized how the vector of global activity has indeed shifted to Asia, creating new development prospects.

"Today, with EDB co-financing, we are implementing large-scale projects in Almaty such as the conversion of CHPP-2 (combined heat and power plant) to gas, the expansion of Almaty International Airport and the Big Almaty Ring Road. Investment in these projects totals $2.2 billion," he said.

Dosayev also highlighted Almaty's significance as the cultural, research, business and financial hub of Kazakhstan, contributing nearly a fifth of the country's GDP (18.5 percent in 2022) and more than one-fourth of its tax revenues. The city is home to 90 percent of the country's bank headquarters and 111 offices of international organizations and businesses.

"Our main mission is to make Almaty a comfortable and safe city by attracting talent, technology and investment from around the world. We particularly focus on green projects and initiatives such as the modernization of transportation, energy-efficient housing and the upgrade of utilities," he added and expressed confidence in fostering "further cooperation and implementation of such projects".

Community members hold candles during a prayer vigil at a church in Farmington, New Mexico, on Monday. SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN / AP

Teen kills 3 before police shoot him in New Mexico

TAOS, New Mexico — An 18-year-old gunman stalked through a New Mexico neighborhood on Monday, firing randomly at bystanders, houses and cars, killing three people and wounding six before police shot him dead outside a church, authorities said.

The late-morning shooting spree unfolded in a residential area of Farmington, New Mexico, a major retail center and regional hub for the fossil energy industry about 290 kilometers northwest of Albuquerque.

Police responded "to find a chaotic scene where a male subject was actively firing upon individuals in that neighborhood", Baric Crum, deputy chief of operations for the Farmington Police Department, said in a news briefing hours later.

Three civilians were killed and six people were wounded, including two officers struck in an exchange of gunfire with the suspect before he was fatally shot by police, according to Farmington police spokesperson Shanice Gonzales.

The country yet again is caught in another spate of gun violence. The carnage was among the latest of at least 225 mass shootings recorded in the US this year, according to the nonprofit group Gun Violence Archive. The group defines a mass shooting as any in which four or more people are wounded or killed, not including the shooter.

An opinion article published on Sunday in Forbes said that gun violence is a public health emergency in the United States, but repeated attempts to introduce gun control measures have run into formidable opposition in the US Congress as well as the judiciary.

Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the US, and these deaths are preventable, Joshua Cohen, an independent health-care analyst, said in the article.

"A comprehensive and multifaceted public health approach is needed to prevent gun violence, one which addresses both access to firearms and the underlying factors — societal, mental — that contribute to gun violence," Cohen said.

However, he said that "in the current political climate, it's nearly impossible at the federal level to pass even comparatively benign interventions into law, such as universal background checks, age limits, firearm licensing, and a ban on assault weapons or high-capacity magazines".

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham said in a statement that she was praying for the families of the victims and that the incident "serves yet another reminder of how gun violence destroys lives in our state and our country every single day."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

EBRD lowers Turkiye GDP forecast, upgrades Russia

LONDON — Turkiye's quake-hit economy will grow this year by less than previously forecast, while Russian output will shrink far less than expected despite Ukraine conflict sanctions, Europe's development bank said on Tuesday.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or EBRD, published its latest outlook for a region hit by rampant inflation and slowing global economic activity.

The EBRD predicted Turkish GDP will expand 2.5 percent this year, cutting prior guidance of 3 percent and citing the impact of "unorthodox" loose monetary policy alongside one of the world's highest inflation rates, as well as February's deadly earthquake.

Official estimates put the damage inflicted by the earthquake at more than $100 billion, the EBRD said.

Turkiye, meanwhile, faces a presidential runoff on May 28 between President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu after neither candidate secured the 50 percent threshold to win in Sunday's election. EBRD chief economist Beata Javorcik told Agence France-Presse: "No matter who wins, there are some difficult choices awaiting the new Turkish government."

People shop at a market in Istanbul on May 4. DILARA SENKAYA / REUTERS

It came as Turkiye's main banking stock index tumbled 9.6 percent as markets gauged potential fallout from a possible continuation of Erdogan's unorthodox policies, including combating high inflation with low-interest rates. The index rose last week 26 percent, the largest weekly gain since late 2002.

The Istanbul bourse benchmark fell 6.1 percent on Monday, its largest daily percentage drop since early February.

The lira posted its largest percentage drop in over six months to end at 19.67 per dollar — a closing record low. It earlier touched 19.70, not far from the record intraday low of 19.80 hit in March.

Turning to Russia, the EBRD forecast Tuesday that its economy will shrink 1.5 percent, compared with a previous estimate of a 3 percent contraction.

The upgrade for the key energy producer was driven by higher oil price expectations and as Western sanctions force it to sell elsewhere.

The EBRD also noted that its region's inflation remained stubbornly high at 14.3 percent in March, after spiking last year on soaring energy prices after the start of the Ukraine conflict.

2023 is "a very difficult year for Central Europe and Baltics, as inflation is eroding the purchasing power of consumers", Javorcik added.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

WORLD

Stress busting

Palestinian children participate in an activity in Deir el-Balah, Gaza Strip, on Monday, aimed at supporting their mental health after they were affected by fighting between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Israeli forces and the militant group have agreed to a cease-fire. IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA / REUTERS

Report exposes FBI flaws in Trump probe

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

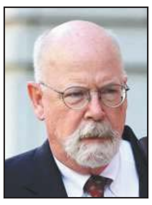
A special counsel report on the FBI's investigation into former US president Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign concluded on Monday that neither US law enforcement nor the intelligence community "appears to have possessed any actual evidence of (Russian) collusion" at the start of the probe.

The 306-page document marked the end of a four-year investigation launched when then-attorney general William Barr appointed John Durham to look at potential mistakes in the FBI's inquiry into possible contacts between Trump's campaign and Moscow.

The FBI probe, known as Crossfire Hurricane, was later turned over to special counsel Robert Mueller, who in March 2019 said there was no evidence of a criminal conspiracy between the campaign and Russia, although he was critical of Trump.

Monday's report said that FBI agents were so determined to go after Trump in 2016 that they championed "seriously flawed information" and abandoned their "own principles regarding objectivity and integrity".

"Based on the review of Crossfire Hurricane and related intelligence activities, we conclude that the (Justice) Department and the FBI failed to uphold their mission of strict fidelity to the law in connection with certain events and activities described in this report," Durham wrote.



John Durham

On Monday, Trump posted on his Truth Social media platform: "After extensive research, Special Counsel John Durham concludes the FBI never should have launched the Trump-Russia Probe! In other words, the American Public was scammed, just as it is being scammed right now by those who don't want to see GREATNESS for AMERICA!"

Durham said that the FBI rushed to investigate Trump even as it proceeded with caution on allegations related to Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidate at the time.

Though the FBI warned Clinton's team when it learned of possible evidence by a foreign actor to gain influence with her, agents did not give similar briefings to the Trump campaign before opening an investigation, the report said.

As an example of bias by the FBI, Durham said it was unable to corroborate "a single substantive allegation" in a dossier of allegations, some salacious, against Trump compiled by former British spy Christopher Steele.

The FBI issued a statement on Monday in response to the report saying that the conduct in 2016 and 2017 that Durham examined "was the reason that current FBI leadership already implemented dozens of corrective actions, which have now been in place for some time".

Legal analyst Jonathan Turley tweeted: "The Report's elaborate details shred (former FBI director) James Comey's claims of professionalism. Yet, Comey continues to sell books on his vision of 'ethical leadership' after overseeing what Durham calls an abandonment of 'fealty' to the law and standards of the FBI."

Emerald Robinson, a conservative journalist, was skeptical of the report's impact. "Lots of conservative media folks seem to be happy that Durham 'proved' the FBI/CIA fabricated the Russia Hoax. That's called: coping mechanism. Durham was not supposed to do a book report. He was supposed to clean up the Deep State. Instead, he's part of the cover-up," she wrote online.

The original Russia investigation was opened in July 2016 after the FBI learned from an Australian diplomat that a Trump campaign associate named George Papadopoulos had claimed to know of "dirt" that the Russians had on Clinton in the form of hacked emails.

But revelations over the following months exposed flaws in the investigation, including errors and omissions in Justice Department applications to eavesdrop on a former Trump campaign aide, Carter Page, and the reliance by the FBI on a dossier of uncorroborated or discredited information compiled by Steele.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Six killed in New Zealand hostel fire

WELLINGTON — A fire ripped through a four-story hostel in New Zealand's capital in the early hours of Tuesday, killing at least six people as others fled for their lives, with some plucked from the roof.

Towering flames and thick smoke could be seen pouring from the top-floor windows of the Loafers Lodge hostel in central Wellington during the night, as 80 firefighters and 20 trucks battled the blaze.

Firefighters found six bodies inside the charred building, but a roof collapse on the top floor prevented them from searching the 92-room hostel, emergency services said.

Police said the final toll could not be confirmed until they had entered the building for a "methodical" examination once it was made safe, probably on Wednesday.

Six people were taken to hospital, one in serious condition, the city's ambulance service said. An additional 15 people were treated at the scene. More than 50 people were rescued.

The fire was being treated as "suspicious", Fire and Emergency New Zealand region manager Bruce Stubbs told reporters.

But police said it would remain "unexplained" until their investigators could examine the scene.

About 90 people were thought to have been in the building when the blaze began, fire services said.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins described the fire as "an absolute tragedy". Hipkins praised the "incredible efforts" of firefighters to extinguish the blaze and evacuate people.

The building was inspected early this year and it met all requirements. However, it does not have sprinkler systems, said New Zealand Housing Minister Megan Woods.

"The building code does not require the retrofitting of sprinkler systems into existing older buildings, so there will be a number of buildings that fall into that category," Hipkins said, adding that there could be quite a large number of buildings that do not have sprinkler systems.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Negotiations on debt ceiling to resume

US President Joe Biden and Republican leaders were set to reconvene on Tuesday for talks on raising the US borrowing limit, with a possible debt default just weeks away. The Treasury has warned of "catastrophic" economic consequences if the US runs out of cash to pay its bills. Fresh data reinforces the prospect of a default "potentially as early as June 1", said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Monday. The two parties remain sharply divided on the issue, with Republicans insisting Biden agree to significant spending cuts in exchange for their support to raise the debt ceiling.

AFRICA

Kenya, Somalia agree on border reopening

Kenya and Somalia have agreed to reopen their common border after more than a decade, Kenya's interior minister said on Monday as ties warm between the two neighbors after years of tensions. The announcement came after a high-level joint ministerial meeting in Nairobi on cooperation, including security, trade and the movement of people. The two nations had announced plans in July to reopen the frontier at talks between then-Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta and his Somali counterpart Hassan Sheikh Mohamud but they never materialized.

ITALY

$880m of cocaine found in banana crates

Police in southern Italy said on Tuesday they had seized 2,700 kilograms of pure cocaine hidden in two refrigerated containers carrying bananas that had been shipped from Ecuador. The haul found in the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro would have been worth more than 800 million euros ($880 million), Italy's Guardia di Finanza police said. The shipment had come from Ecuador and its final destination was Armenia. The drugs were discovered in the 12-meter containers, helped by a sniffer dog named Joel.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

G7's coercion claim slammed as 'absurd'

US, allies urged to abandon hypocritical finger-pointing, hold talks with Beijing

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The United States and its Western allies have been the major perpetrators of economic coercion that have inflicted suffering on millions of people around the world, according to international experts and scholars.

G7 leaders meeting in Hiroshima, Japan, from Friday to Sunday are set to issue a statement that includes their concerns about alleged economic coercion by China, Reuters reported, citing unnamed US officials.

"The report that the G7 may call out China's economic coercion is hypocritical given that the US is by far the world's biggest deployer of unilateral coercive measures," said Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University economist who served as a special adviser to the UN secretary-general from 2001 to 2018.

Research by Francisco Rodriguez, a professor at the University of Denver's Josef Korbel School of International Studies, has found that economic coercion by the US, the European Union and other Western allies has devastated vulnerable groups in targeted countries and degraded living standards.

He reports that 30 of 32 studies on the effects of economic sanctions by the US and others found that they had negative effects on outcomes including per capita income, poverty, inequality, mortality and human rights.

In the cases of Iran, Afghanistan and Venezuela, sanctions that restricted government access to foreign exchanges affected the ability of those states to provide essential public goods and services, and had substantial negative spillovers on private sector and nongovernmental actors, according to the research published online on May 4 by the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Better approach

"Rather than accusing China of what the G7 itself does, a much better approach by the G7 would be to call for discussions with China so that all countries ensure that economic and trade measures are compatible with the UN Charter and World Trade Organization rules," Sachs said.

He said the G7 represents a group of wealthy countries allied with the US that accounts for 10 percent of the global population and 31 percent of global GDP at international prices. By comparison, BRICS — a bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — represent 40 percent and 32 percent respectively.

"The G20, which brings the two (G7 and BRICS) together and others, is a much more representative grouping," he said, adding that the G20 should be expanded to include the African Union to increase representation.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said on Jan 11 at the inauguration of the headquarters of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that China was the first country to support the AU in joining the G20 and will encourage G20 members to take robust steps to support a greater role for the AU and African countries in the global governance system.

Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, warned on Friday that "hostile" US policy risks splitting the world into two blocs. He urged the West to offer investment not "lectures" to developing countries.

"It would be a good idea … for the other G7 countries to try to put pressure on the United States and say, what you're doing is forming the world into two blocs, and that will be hard," he told the Agence France-Presse on the sidelines of the G7 ministerial talks in Japan.

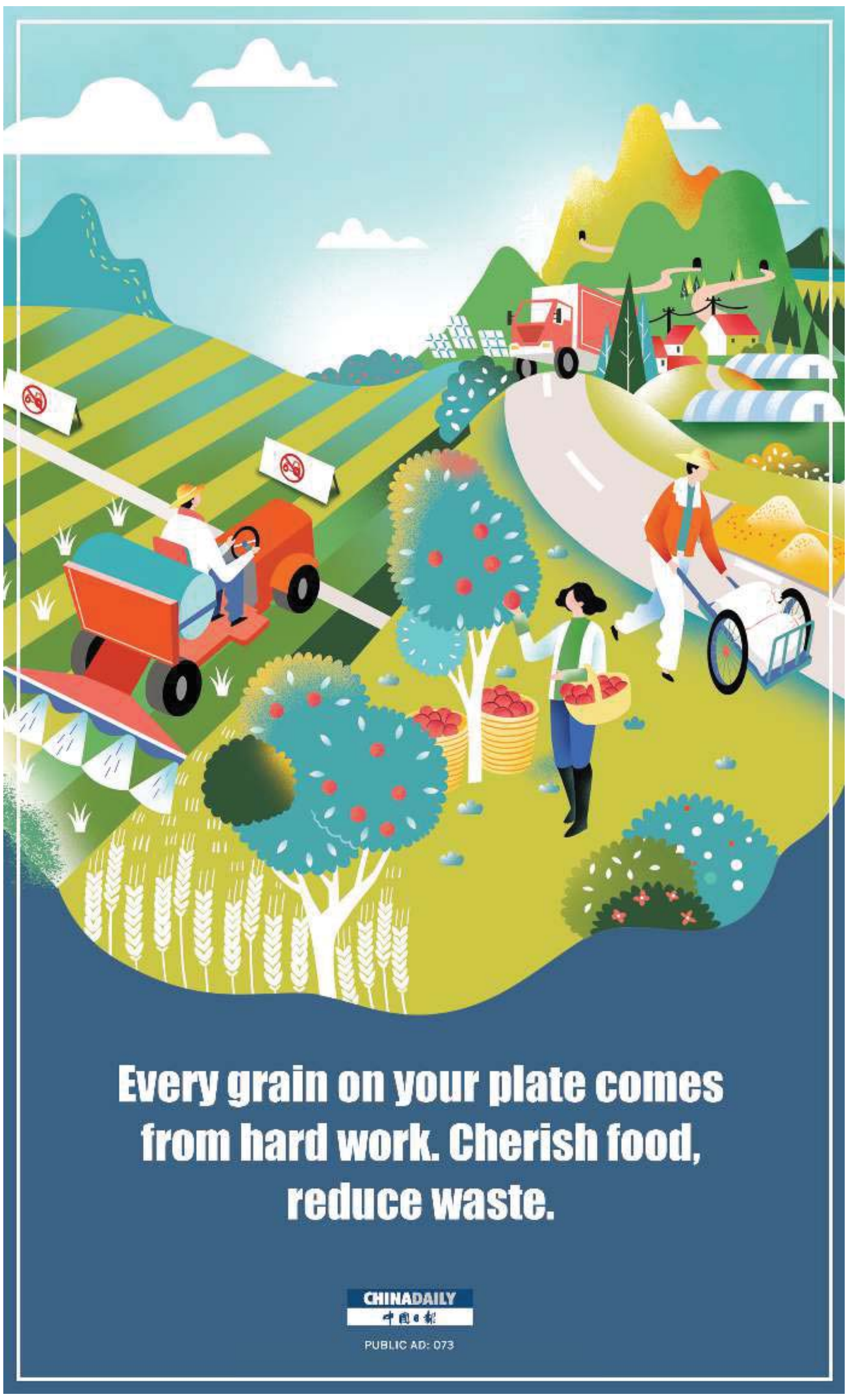
Stiglitz warned that competition between US Democrats and Republicans to look tough on China could undermine international action on climate change and other global crises.

Carlos Martinez, co-editor of Friends of Socialist China, a London-based platform, echoed Sachs by saying that "any accusation of Chinese economic coercion is beyond absurd".

"The US is by far the global leader in unilateral sanctions," he said, citing the cases of Iran, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and China.

Martinez added that the US has been using the role of the dollar in the global economy to apply long-arm jurisdiction, forcing third parties to go along with its sanctions regime.

"The G7 states are all involved in multiple forms of economic coercion, and to accuse China of doing so is hypocritical in the extreme," he said.



Mild real estate recovery seen turning substantial

By **ZHANG YUE** in Beijing and **WANG YING** in Shanghai

The real estate recovery, though still mild, is likely to become substantial on the back of policy incentives and higher sales later this year, officials and experts said on Tuesday after digesting the latest industry data released by the National Bureau of Statistics.

NBS data showed property sales and investment continued to decline year-on-year between January and April, with property sales recovering faster.

Property investment in the first four months fell 6.2 percent year-on-year, widening from a 5.8 percent year-on-year decline in the first quarter. Sales of commercial properties by floor area slid 0.4 percent over the same period, compared to a 1.8 percent fall in the first quarter.

Specifically, home sales by residential area went up by 2.7 percent in the first four months, while residential home sales by value rose 11.8 percent year-on-year in the January-April period, a faster recovery from the first quarter.

At a news conference on Tuesday, Fu Linghui, the NBS spokesperson, said that despite signs of recovery in demand, both investment and construction in the property sector are still contracting, and the entire property market is experiencing a stage of adjustment.

"Further efforts are required to keep the real estate market stable, and to ensure and improve people's livelihoods," he said. "We expect that in the next stage, backed by overall economic recovery, policy incentives targeting the real estate market will see tangible effects. Market expectation will thus improve, and the housing market is expected to gradually stabilize."

He noted that property sales in hot-spot property markets such as the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, turned out to be more robust than elsewhere. With more vital buying capacity, home prices in first-tier cities are climbing faster than second- and third-tier cities.

He said the pickup in home sales has helped ease the liquidity crunch faced by real estate developers. In the first four months, funds raised by property developers fell by 6.4 percent year-on-year, narrowing from the 9 percent drop in the first quarter.

"The new figures of both property sales and investment show that currently, property developers are still focusing on completing and delivering overdue housing projects, and new construction investment remains subdued," said Liu Lijie, a market analyst from the Beike Research Institute.

"Going forward, we expect the housing market will lead to a quicker cash return for property developers, and their liability status will improve. This will also improve market confidence in the context of new project construction and investment," Liu said.

Contact the writers at zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Potential homebuyers look at property models during an expo in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

First yuan-settled LNG cargo unloaded

Unloading of China's first cross-border yuan-settled liquefied natural gas was successfully completed on Tuesday, China National Offshore Oil Corp said. The company's LNG carrier *Marweh*, carrying some 65,000 metric tons of LNG from the United Arab Emirates, finished unloading at CNOOC Guangdong Dapeng LNG receiving station on Tuesday, marking a substantial step forward in cross-border yuan-settlement transactions in the oil and gas trade.

Baidu to integrate its chatbot across units

Technology giant Baidu Inc said on Tuesday that it plans to gradually integrate its ChatGPT-like chatbot service Ernie Bot into all its businesses, and will continue to invest in the fast-developing generative artificial intelligence sector in the coming quarters. The company said total revenue touched 31.1 billion yuan ($4.54 billion) in the first quarter, a 10 percent increase year-on-year.

CHINA DAILY

A visitor tries out a wine at the third China-CEEC Expo in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday.
HU XUEJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

China-CEEC Expo drives 'practical' ties

Major event attracts 3,000 exhibitors, 100,000 visitors, promising win-win

By **MA ZHENHUAN** and **YU YIN** in Ningbo, Zhejiang

The China-CEEC Expo has become one of the most important pragmatic platforms under the cooperative framework between China and CEEC, and China will seek to push ahead all-round communication and cooperation with CEEC, industry observers and government officials said.

CEEC is a generic term that refers to Central and Eastern European Countries.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Tuesday in Beijing that China is willing to share its development dividends and related benefits with CEEC to create a win-win atmosphere.

The 3rd China-CEEC Expo and International Consumer Goods Fair, which is simply called the China-CEEC Expo, kicked off in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday.

The five-day event, whose theme is "Practical Cooperation for a Shared Future", is expected to attract about 3,000 exhibitors, more than 10,000 buyers and over 100,000 visitors. Purchase orders worth over 10 billion yuan ($1.43 billion) for CEEC products are expected during the event.

"The China-CEEC Expo is an important platform to promote practical cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries," said Wang Yong, vice-chairman of 14th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, in his address at the opening ceremony in Ningbo on Tuesday.

Hungary is the only guest of honor or country at this year's event and 35 Hungarian companies are participating in the expo.

"China is Hungary's largest trading partner outside Europe," said Peter Szijjarto, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade.

Official data showed that bilateral trade between the two countries surpassed $15 billion in 2022.

In 2014, the CEEC Products Fair was held in Ningbo. Since 2015, the city has hosted four sessions of the China-CEEC Investment and Trade Expo. In 2019, the event was upgraded to China's only State-level exhibition that is targeted at CEEC and renamed it as the China-CEEC Expo and International Consumer Goods Fair.

"One-third of the exhibitors are displaying their products here for the past three successive expos while another one-third of the exhibitors are newcomers," said Zhang Yadong, director of the Ningbo CEEC Exhibition and Cooperation Promotion Center. "It's a win for the event that the old friends are willing to participate again and new friends are attracted to the expo."

Peter Lisicky, owner of Vino Peter Lisicky Winery in Slovakia, said his firm has exported wine to China for three years. He said he has high expectations from the winery's participation in the expo.

"Sales of our products have been growing over the past three years," said Lisicky. "We are very happy to be here in China, our biggest market. And we want to expand our market presence."

The Slovakian wine firm benefits from Ningbo's efforts to build itself into the first choice of CEEC to export goods to the Chinese market. In recent years, the city has coordinated departments, including commerce, port and Customs, to help traders in CEEC solve problems and facilitate trade flows.

In 2022, Ningbo's imports from CEEC reached 11.2 billion yuan, a more than ninefold increase from 2016. In the first quarter of this year, Ningbo's imports from CEEC increased by 102 percent year-on-year to 4.39 billion yuan.

Sinotrans Zhejiang Co Ltd, one of the expo participants, has been involved in the transport of CEEC products since 2018. One of its executives, Yao Zhengyi, said that during the preparations for this year's expo, Ningbo Customs upgraded the Customs clearance services.

A special channel was launched for exhibits giving traders access to make Customs clearance appointments round the clock. The imported products can be directly sent to the expo venue after a one-stop Customs inspection at ports of entry.

The expo offered a broad platform for the China-CEEC investment projects. "This year marks the 11th anniversary of the launch of the China-CEEC cooperation framework. TCL has cooperated with CEEC for many years," said Li Dongsheng, chairman of the consumer electronics giant TCL.

Li said TCL has invested nearly $100 million in upgrading a Polish factory with digital and smart technology. The annual capacity of the factory is now 50 times that in 2004.

Zdravko Marinkovic, president of the Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, called for more cooperation in various fields.

"A number of opportunities for cooperation between China and CEEC are arising in the fields of energy, infrastructure construction, the transition to a circular economy, and the revival and implementation of the green energy principles," said Marinkovic.

Contact the writers at mazhenhuan@chinadaily.com.cn

Step won't help reduce US solar imports

By **ZHENG XIN**
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Last week's guideline of the US Treasury Department allowing only US-based solar developers to secure tax credits, would barely affect the country's reliance on Chinese supplies, considering the limited production capacity in the United States, industry experts said.

On Friday, the US government, seeking to speed up reshoring of clean energy supply chains, issued new guideline that would allow only US-based solar developers to secure tax credits offered via the Inflation Reduction Act if they made their cells domestically.

While some investors may see the guideline as a boon for solar manufacturers in the US, others may feel it would do little in the short term to reduce the US dependence on imports from China, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Lin said: "The US attempt to counter China's leading position in global clean tech supply chains might not work as they expect, considering the small solar cell production capacity in the US. It will not change the current situation and the US will still (have to) rely on China in developing clean energies in the short term."

Many of the related manufacturing industries in the US are virtually nonexistent or too small, while Chinese manufacturing competes across the entire industry chain, he said.

According to the International Energy Agency, China produces nearly all of the world's wafers, 85 percent of all cells and 75 percent of all modules. The country is also the world-leading producer of polysilicon, a critical raw material used in solar modules, it said.

The US, on the other hand, currently manufactures 8.9 gigawatts of solar modules, enough to meet only half of 2022 demand and far below China's production capacity of 600 GW, according to Wood Mackenzie, a global energy research and consultancy group.

Some US solar developers, despite the tax credits offered by the US government, may still buy panels elsewhere, including Southeast Asia, India and Europe, due to economic reasons, said Lin.

Panels from Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam accounted for 75 percent of all solar power capacity export to the US in 2022, according to Rystad Energy, an independent energy research and business intelligence company based in Norway.

"With increasing pressure for carbon neutrality, relying on US manufacturing alone is not only not practical but also far from sufficient, and the US solar component production capacity is insignificant compared to that of China. It will be challenging for the US to establish a competitive position throughout the entire industry chain without support from China," said Lin.

Agreed Pol Lezcano, a senior associate at BloombergNEF, an energy industry data provider, saying the US will still rely on supplies from China directly and indirectly.

Friday's guidance may encourage more solar cell manufacturing in the US, but most of the cells used in US solar projects will continue to come from factories in Southeast Asia, most of them owned by Chinese companies, Lezcano was quoted as saying by Financial Times.

The United States added 20.2 GW of solar capacity in 2022, down 16 percent from the previous year, according to a joint report from Wood Mackenzie and the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Lin said the new regulations are more of a result of a compromise. While the US is eager to reduce its reliance on imported solar panels, it cannot afford to wait for domestic supplies if it does not want to delay the clean energy revolution for several years, he said.

Stink spins delicious profits as durian imports rise

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG** in Beijing and **ZHANG LI** in Nanning

The tropical fruit durian, known as the "King of Fruits" and also for its infamous stink, green, large thorns or spikes and high-end price tag, is ubiquitous in China as access to the vast Chinese market has become easier for exporters in Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, imported fruit market insiders said.

In terms of durian consumption globally, China lags only Indonesia and Malaysia now as domestic production of tropical fruits is limited, necessitating imports.

With the gradual implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership pact, the largest global free trade agreement, and the deepening of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, Thai durian exports to China are expected to surge, said Wanlada Ratanapanich, consul of commercial section at the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Ratanapanich said China is the most important export destination for durian growers in Thailand.

According to the Thai Ministry of Commerce, in 2022, a wide range of fruits worth $4.41 billion were exported to China, with durian, mangosteen and longan being the top three.

"China has big potential for fruit exports from Thailand," said Ratanapanich during the Thai fruit festival held in Nanning on Saturday. "The Chinese imports of fruits from Thailand have been on the rise continuously."

Guangxi's proximity to Thailand gives it easier access to the Chinese market for Thai fruit exporters. Prices of durian have dropped considerably after the COVID-19 pandemic control measures were optimized in China, making the fruit affordable for many Chinese consumers, she said.

Yu Huiyong, founder of Shenzhen Pagoda Industrial Group, a leading fruit retailer based in Guangdong province, said the company has increased imports from Thailand, particularly of durians, over the past two decades. The company operates more than 30 plants to process and sell more than 20 varieties of fruits, including durian. It has plans to import 630,000 metric tons of fruits from Thailand this year.

According to Yicai, a Chinese business news outlet, durian dominated the imported fruits market in China in 2022, with a share of $4.02 billion on a volume of 825,000 tons, double that of 2014. According to the General Administration of Customs, between 2015 and 2022, imports of fresh durians to China grew at an aggregated annual rate of 17 percent.

In January, the GAC issued permits to import durian-based products into China from the Philippines. This led to a surge in imports of products like dried durian slices and durian-flavored foods from the Philippines since April.

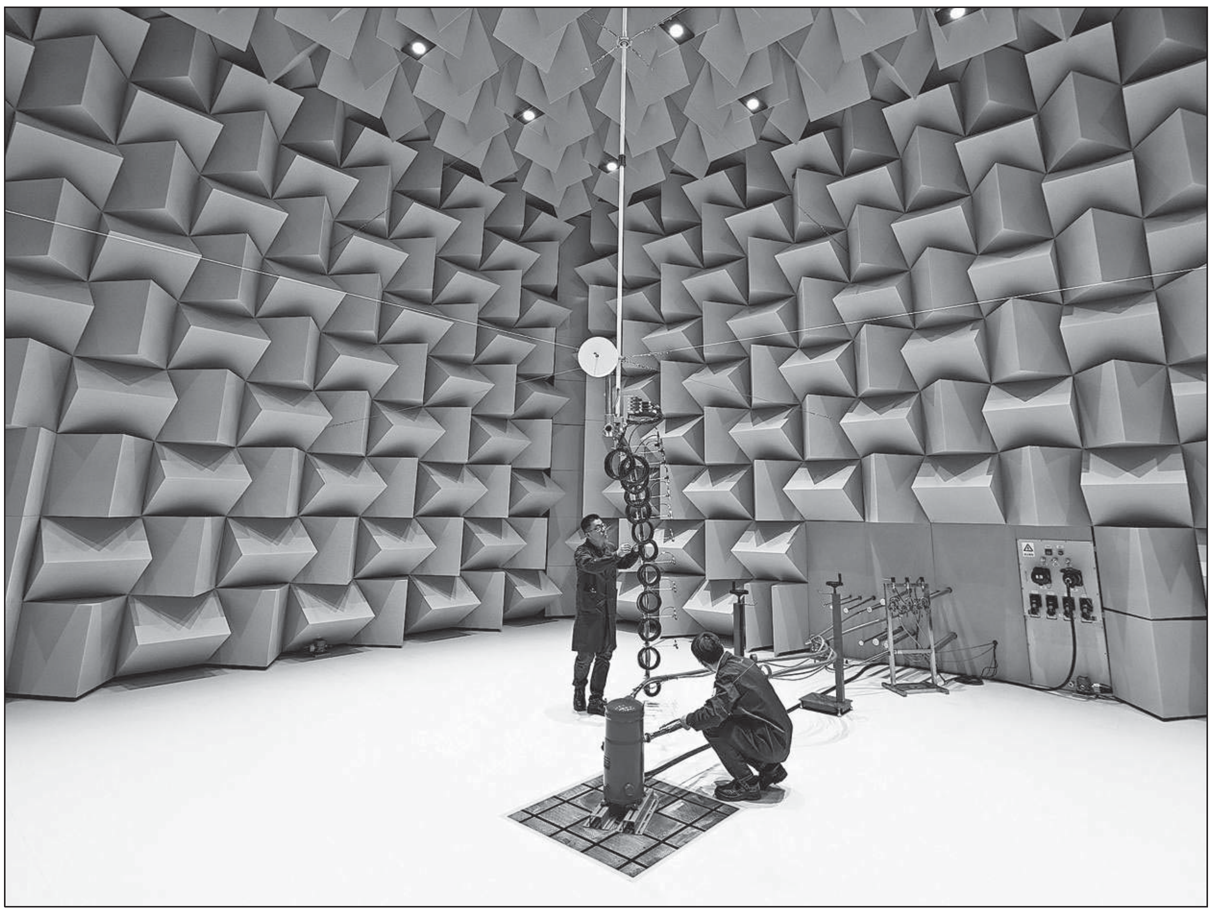
Wang Jianjun, general manager of Shanghai Wonong Import & Export Co Ltd, told Yicai that durians have topped cherries in import volume, as the company imported about 40,000 containers of durians last year. "The buyers are mostly middle- and high-income families in cities."

Chinese retailers and catering firms have shown a strong interest in durian products. For instance, Wumart group, a prominent retailer in northern China, said demand for fresh durian products has been growing significantly since April, with sales up 70 percent year-on-year, with most imports coming in from northern Thailand and some parts in Vietnam. The products are sold more offline than online. Wumart, however, did not disclose related sales figures in terms of volume and value.

"The durian represents tropical fruits. New ways of selling durians, like livestreaming and digital channels, have boosted sales," said Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel.

Contact the writers at wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

BUSINESS



Technicians conduct tests at a Danfoss compressor technology research center in Tianjin on May 10. SUN FANYUE / XINHUA

Danfoss to further tap green biz opportunities in China

Nanjing factory to sharpen Danish tech firm's edge in e-mobility and energy

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Danish technology and engineering conglomerate Danfoss Group's high-end electronic components plant in Nanjing, Jiangsu province will commence production in the second half, after the opening of its global green refrigerants compressors laboratory in Tianjin last week, the company's top executive said.

With a total investment of 100 million euros ($108.8 million), the Nordborg, Denmark-headquartered group's new Nanjing factory will manufacture IGBT (insulated-gate bipolar transistor power) modules, which are power semiconductor die products. Danfoss said the move will strongly support its businesses in e-mobility, energy and industrial applications in China.

The growth opportunities come from many Chinese companies' moves to pursue sustainable growth, the government's foreign trade and consumption stimulus packages and the rapid pace of industrial upgrading, said Kim Fausing, president and CEO of Danfoss Group.

An IGBT power module functions as a switch and can be used to turn electrical power on and off extremely fast and with high energy efficiency, providing low electrical losses.

> We maintain a positive outlook for China's economy as well as our businesses in the country this year."
>
> **Kim Fausing,** president and CEO of Danfoss Group

Covering an area of 7,000 square meters with a total investment of 140 million yuan ($20.1 million), Fausing said its new green refrigerants compressors laboratory in Tianjin is designed to focus on the research and testing of commercial compressors, especially variable frequency technology and the company's relevant application in heat pumps, as well as alternative green refrigerant solutions.

"The technologies and solutions tested and proved in the laboratory will be widely used in air conditioning, heat pumps, data centers, cold chains and energy storage," he said. "This is expected to play a significant role in the global green transition, especially in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change."

"We maintain a positive outlook for China's economy as well as our businesses in the country this year," said Fausing, adding that the company's business is in strong alignment with China's green agenda, which is fueling the optimistic view of its performance in the country.

For example, China's State-owned enterprises have been accelerating the construction of new energy projects since the start of the year, from photovoltaic power stations to offshore wind farms. Many of them have been forming partnerships with global companies in these fields to enhance their business strength, according to information released by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council.

Fausing said Danfoss' business in China has experienced rapid growth in recent years. Its sales in China reached around 4 billion yuan in 2015, while in 2022, the number has more than doubled to around 10 billion yuan. One of the main drivers of its continued and robust growth is the strong momentum in green investment unleashed by China's pledge to reach its dual-carbon goals.

Echoing that sentiment, Ding Rijia, a professor specializing in energy at China University of Mining and Technology in Beijing, said China's plans to peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 will encourage more multinational corporations to deploy their latest products and solutions in the country, especially in the areas of manufacturing, aviation, chemicals, transportation and power generation.

Pushed by these factors, as well as an improved business environment and a series of promotional activities, foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, rose 4.9 percent year-on-year to 408.45 billion yuan in the first quarter of 2023. Specifically, FDI in high-tech manufacturing increased 18 percent from the same period a year ago, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Eager to secure more market share in China, Danfoss signed an agreement with the local government in Haiyan, Zhejiang province last week to officially launch the construction of Danfoss' second industrial campus in the city.

This project will be constructed by the local government, which Danfoss will rent and invest in the equipment with its own funds.

Supported by more than 42,000 employees globally, the family-owned Danish company has made continued investments in such areas as green technology, digital solutions and electrification in recent years. Its investments in innovation surged 39 percent on a yearly basis to 457 million euros in 2022, corresponding to 4.5 percent of its sales revenue.

With 11 manufacturing bases in municipalities and provinces, such as Tianjin, Zhejiang and Liaoning, Danfoss currently has more than 5,500 employees in China.

Ice tea turning into hot niche as thirst season arrives

By ZHENG YIRAN
zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

Summer is here, and people are meeting up to drink more ice tea — served with ice and dry ice — in the afternoons, setting off a consumption trend that has gone viral on social media platforms.

Chinese ice tea — different from the stove-boiled tea that is a staple of winters — is a cold brew whose fresh leaves draw out its vibrant flavor. The tea is made beforehand, put into clear glass bottles, and served with fresh fruit, ice jelly and ice dumplings.

When water is poured onto the dry ice, a misty atmosphere pervades instantly, making it just the perfect offering for consumers in summer.

By May 3, there were more than 3.8 million views of Chinese ice tea on short-video platform Douyin, while it was viewed 1.58 million times on lifestyle sharing platform Xiaohongshu.

> Chinese ice tea creates a fancy atmosphere that consumers are happy to share on their social media platforms."
>
> **Gong Jianxiang,** director of Pusuu Tea Space

"Chinese ice tea requires a huge amount of ice. Enterprises may need to purchase ice machines. In addition, as the misty atmosphere created by dry ice doesn't last long, merchants should consider how to make up for user experience," said Xu Ran, an analyst with market information provider KamenClub.

She said ice tea providers could consider increasing the use of electric stoves so that consumers can boil fruit tea after the mist settles. They could also offer enticing snacks to hold on to consumers, she said.

"For enterprises, the threshold of Chinese ice tea is higher than that of stove-boiled tea, as cold-brewed tea needs to be made six to eight hours before serving, and needs to be refrigerated," Xu said.

Pusuu Tea Space launched Chinese ice tea in mid-April, Gong Jianxiang, director of the Beijing-based tea house, said.

At a price of 398 yuan for about 2-4 people, Chinese ice tea has become popular among consumers, he said. The per capita consumption of Chinese ice tea varies between 65 yuan ($9.4) and 80 yuan currently, depending on the ambiance of the cafe in which it is served.

"Chinese ice tea creates a fancy atmosphere that consumers are happy to share on their social media platforms. It has become an A-lister," Gong said.

He said content homogenization exists among stores, and that merchants, in addition to offering Chinese ice tea, should provide products with their own unique characteristics to retain consumers.

"The popularity of Chinese ice tea reflects consumer demand for emotional value. They need products that can make them feel relaxed. Merchants should grasp the opportunity to offer high-quality products and services for sustainable development," he said.

Bullish on prospects in nation, Hugo Boss plans more stores, sub-brands

GENEVA — China has become the world's new fashion and technology trendsetter, said Daniel Grieder, CEO of Hugo Boss.

The global fashion and lifestyle company, headquartered in Metzingen, Germany, has around 17,000 employees worldwide and sells women's and men's apparel, shoes and accessories. Grieder has been its CEO since June 2021.

"The Chinese people are always open to exploring newness and expect not just high-quality products from a brand, but also high-quality consumption experience like our trendiest products," Grieder said in a recent interview with Xinhua.

Grieder said Chinese consumers are also "very digital and tech-savvy. We see a lot of trends that we can experience in China first, sometimes before they spread in Europe".

"The Chinese people … want new experiences in the stores and, of course, online," he added.

Grieder also expressed satisfaction with the brand's performance in China.

Driven by China's growing consumption power, the company had announced plans to launch more stores and sub-brands.

> We see a lot of trends that we can experience in China first, sometimes before they spread in Europe."
>
> **Daniel Grieder,** CEO of Hugo Boss

"We already have more than 200 points of sale in China in 65 cities. We have a very strong team in place and we are in a very strong position. We see a lot of opportunities to open more stores but also to launch new sub-brands," he said.

Earlier this month, the company reported a 25 percent jump in currency-adjusted group sales to 968 million euros ($1 billion) in the first quarter and said it expected group sales to increase by 10 percent to around 4 billion euros in 2023.

Grieder said that China was on a positive momentum fueled by high consumer demand. "We are on a good path in China," he added.

XINHUA

Tianjin unveils plans for industrial park to boost higher-level innovation

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Tianjin is expected to gather pace amid its push for higher-level innovation, supported by the launch of the Tiankai Higher Education Innovation Park, an incubation hub and high-tech industrial park, in the North China municipality, officials of local universities said.

Their comments were made during a media event announcing the progress of the park's inauguration ceremony, which will be held on Thursday, along with the opening of the seventh World Intelligence Congress.

Construction of the new park will be supported by two major domestic institutions — Tianjin University and Nankai University — to better serve entrepreneurs and high-tech and innovative enterprises, they added.

The project is part of the municipality's goal to cultivate a leading global industrial hub for such players, the officials said.

The park will include facilities located in three downtown districts in the coastal city, according to the plan.

A major part of the park is set in the Nankai district and will be built based on a former science and technological park near the main campuses of the two neighboring universities, with a construction area of 1 square kilometer.

The other two parts, covering 0.17 sq km, will rise near the campuses of two universities in southern Tianjin's Jinnan district. An industrial town of 24.79 sq km will also be built in Xiqing district to facilitate the development of the park.

Chen Yulu, president of Nankai University, said, "The university, supported by its students and alumni, will ramp up efforts to attract more funds and resources to build the park into a leading global incubation and sci-tech hub."

A special fund is in the pipeline to support entrepreneurs who graduate from the universities, the plan said.

Jin Donghan, president of Tianjin University, said, "Supporting the building of Tiankai is part of the university's efforts to help boost the municipality's high-quality development and accelerate the commercialization of our research achievements."

Liu Yi, president of the Tianjin University Alumni Association and president of Andon Health Co Ltd, said the association has collected funds of up to 10 billion yuan ($1.43 billion). The association will also help draw investments for the projects of startups in the park.

New transit line underway

An aerial view of the construction site of an EMU (electric multiple unit) Depot on the railway line between Beijing Daxing International Airport and Langfang, Hebei province. According to China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, the State-owned builder of the depot, the project that entered construction last week aims to facilitate the maintenance and operation of bullet trains between the two regions. Apart from serving passengers bound for the airport, the newly planned railway is part of the local governments' efforts to boost the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

Wuling EVs enable Indonesia's green mobility

Current chair of ASEAN woos investment, promotes ecosystem for new energy vehicles

Wuling Air electric vehicles at the camp of Wuling Motors Indonesia are on standby for the 42nd ASEAN Summit in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. Wuling provided commuter services for delegations to and from the summit venue from May 9 to 11. XU QIN / XINHUA

LABUAN BAJO, Indonesia — There were about a dozen cars on standby at around 8:30 am at the Wuling Motors Indonesia camp during the 42nd ASEAN Summit from May 10-11, out of a fleet of 50 cars.

The other Wuling Air electric vehicles were on duty. The Wuling EVs were in Indonesia to provide commuter services for delegations to and from the summit from May 9-11 in the tourist town of Labuan Bajo in East Nusa Tenggara province.

Over 370 EVs were deployed to provide the biannual summit with transportation, including 282 specifically used for delegates.

Dian Asmahani, brand and marketing director for Wuling Sales Indonesia, said Wuling was proud to be part of the service for the summit, as well as Indonesia's efforts to develop an EV ecosystem both at home and in Southeast Asia.

As with its Group of 20 presidency last year, Indonesia — the current Association of Southeast Asian Nations' chair — employed the summit to promote the development of an EV ecosystem in ASEAN, a key step in its domestic and regional new energy transition to reduce emissions.

An agreement on this would be ratified at the summit, according to Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi earlier this year.

"The theme of the 42nd ASEAN summit is ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth. As reflected by the use of EVs during the ASEAN summit, Indonesia is keen to accelerate the transition to greener mobility within the region and wants to make ASEAN the epicenter of growth for electric vehicles as well," Asmahani said.

As the official auto partner at the G20 summit held on the resort island of Bali in November 2022, Wuling provided 300 cars for transportation services. For another ASEAN summit scheduled for September this year, many Wuling EVs will also be in service, Asmahani said, adding, "I think Wuling as a car brand wants to actively participate in EV growth and also the enhancement of electrification in Indonesia."

The Indonesian government has announced policies to woo investment for developing an EV industrial chain from upstream to downstream, and it plans to provide incentives for the sales of 200,000 electric motorcycles and 35,900 electric cars by the end of this year.

Asmahani thinks subsidizing 10 percent of the value-added tax for EV buyers since April demonstrates particularly strong support from the government for developing the EV ecosystem.

In 2022, official data showed the Indonesian automotive market saw sales of about 1.048 million units, including over 30,000 Wuling cars, or 2.9 percent. The Wuling Air EV model ranks top in sales in the new energy vehicle segment, accounting for over 78 percent of the total.

The new energy model has turned out to be Indonesian consumers' favorite, boasting cumulative sales of over 8,600 units since its launch in August.

"The Air EV is the newest version of electric vehicles manufactured by SGMW for the world, and Indonesia has become the first station," Shi Guoyong, president director of Wuling, said at its roll-out ceremony at Wuling's production factory in Bekasi, West Java province.

Wuling Motors Indonesia operates as a subsidiary of major Chinese automaker SAIC-GM-Wuling, which is a joint venture between SAIC Motor, General Motors and Liuzhou Wuling Motors based in Liuzhou, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Currently, Wuling has more than 150 local dealers in Indonesia, with a total of eight types of vehicles produced and sold locally.

In the EV sector, Wuling is not the only Chinese player in Southeast Asia. China's leading EV manufacturer BYD held a groundbreaking ceremony in March for its first car plant in Thailand, while Great Wall Motor, China's leading sport utility vehicle and pickup manufacturer, highlighted its three NEV models at the Malaysia Autoshow 2023 from May 4 to 7.

Looking ahead, Wuling will focus its efforts on the Indonesian market, Asmahani said on May 9 at the Wuling camp in Labuan Bajo. She is confident of Wuling's prospects with the Air EV model in the Indonesian market.

"It is a smart, very good solution for the Indonesian market," she said, noting that apart from being suitable for the road conditions in Indonesia, its price is affordable to Indonesian consumers, which has remained unaffected by inflation.

The car is small, measuring 3 meters in length, 1.5 meters in width and 1.6 meters in height, making it a top choice for driving on Labuan Bajo's two-lane roads leading to the summit's main venue, media center and hotels.

"The car is cute," said Brian Gomgom, public relations manager for Wuling Motors Indonesia. The Wuling camp in Labuan Bajo is staffed with about 80 people, including drivers.

Pointing to a Wuling car painted pristine white, Gomgom explained the detailing on the car's body in addition to the summit logo, saying the special patterns — largely in red and yellow — mark the local culture of Labuan Bajo. Also, the Wuling motto "Shaping Clean Tomorrow" can be seen, he added.

At the summit, Asmahani said Wuling provided services for 13 delegations, keeping three cars in mobile status for each, and operating for 12 hours a day starting from about 8:00 am.

"Being part of the ASEAN summit once again proves our commitment to accelerating green mobility in the global market," she said.

XINHUA

SE Asia prepared to be world's new economic powerhouse

LABUAN BAJO, Indonesia — The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is demonstrating its confidence in becoming a new global economic powerhouse, which was reflected at a summit held from May 10-11 in the Indonesian town of Labuan Bajo.

This year's 42nd ASEAN Summit was held under Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship.

"We have a strong asset as the epicenter of growth, an economy that grows far above average global economic growth, demographic bonuses and sustained regional stability," Indonesian President Joko Widodo said on May 10 at the summit's opening session.

In his remarks at the summit, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, quoted by Vietnam News Agency, highlighted three core factors to ASEAN's characteristics — values, vitality and reputation — which have helped the regional bloc maintain independence and strategic self-reliance, transform into a growth epicenter and better adapt to external shocks.

In an April report, the Asian Development Bank projected that the economies in the Asia-Pacific region will grow 4.8 percent this year and next year, up from 4.2 percent in 2022, adding that growth in the region remains resilient.

Leaders and senior officials are engaging in productive bilateral and multilateral meetings. For example, Widodo met with Pham Minh Chinh on May 9 and discussed joint efforts toward a bilateral trade target of $15 billion by 2028.

On the same day, leaders from Indonesia and Timor-Leste agreed to form a joint working group for economic development in their border areas. Indonesia proposed immediate talks on a bilateral investment treaty.

"When we talk about ASEAN being the epicenter of growth, it is related to opportunities," Indonesian Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Sandiaga Uno said at a news conference on May 10, emphasizing the opportunities in the electric vehicle sector.

Indonesia has been on track to promote EV use in the archipelago and the region amid an energy transition to reduce emissions.

An agreement on developing a regional EV ecosystem was ratified during the summit to build ASEAN into a global production hub for the EV industry.

ASEAN has set a target of raising the proportion of renewable energy in its energy mix to 23 percent by 2025 for a low-carbon future.

In his opening remarks, Widodo mentioned the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as part of efforts to reinforce inclusive cooperation for ASEAN in the future.

The trade deal comprises 15 Asia-Pacific countries, including the 10 ASEAN member states of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and ASEAN's five trading partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

According to the World Bank, RCEP, the world's largest free trade area, covers 2.3 billion people or 30 percent of the world's population, contributes $25.8 trillion or about 30 percent of global gross domestic product, and accounts for $12.7 trillion or over a quarter of global trade in goods and services.

Noting that China and ASEAN are each other's largest trading partners, Indonesian Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Sandiaga Uno said he saw "the relationship between ASEAN and China beneficial for the world".

The International Monetary Fund said in April's World Economic Outlook report that the reopening and growth of China's economy will likely generate positive spillover for countries with stronger trade links and reliance on Chinese tourism.

"After China's reopening of its borders, we are looking to achieve more equitable and more sustainable operations, and with better quality in terms of trade and investment between ASEAN and China," Uno said.

XINHUA

> "After China's reopening of its borders, we are looking to achieve more equitable and more sustainable operations, and with better quality in terms of trade and investment between ASEAN and China."
>
> **Sandiaga Uno,** Indonesian minister of tourism and creative economy

4.8 percent
projected annual growth of Asia-Pacific economies this year and next year, up from 4.2 percent in 2022, said the Asian Development Bank

Left above: The 42nd ASEAN Summit is held in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, from May 10 to 11. XINHUA

Left: A signage of the 42nd ASEAN Summit is seen in Jakarta, Indonesia, on May 5. XU QIN / XINHUA

YOUTH

Left: Pakistani Jalil Fazila, a doctoral student from the University of Science and Technology Beijing, colors a pattern copied from murals in the Mogao Caves with the help of a student from the Dunhuang College of Northwest Normal University in Dunhuang, Gansu province. **Center:** International students take a cultural trip to Dunhuang and pose for pictures in front of the Mogao Caves. **Right:** A student from Syria copies a pattern from the murals in the Mogao Caves at the college. PHOTOS BY HU JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Journey into culture

International students from Chinese universities get to see the splendor of the Mogao Caves and murals in Gansu province, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

When Juni Stefanus Santoso from Indonesia rode a camel in a desert in Dunhuang, Gansu province — an important cultural hub on the Silk Road where cultures from the East and the West met and mixed hundreds of years ago — he felt like he was "stepping into another world" that was exotic, and very different from his previous impression of China.

On a four-day trip to Dunhuang in late April, Santoso, together with other foreign students, mostly from nations along the Silk Road, embarked on a cultural journey to explore the desert landscape, visit the local museum, the Mogao Caves and craftsmen who paint murals and produce Buddhist statues, and communicate with students from the Dunhuang College of Northwest Normal University. All of these activities offered the 23-year-old Indonesian an immersive experience, through which he could soak in the culture of ancient China.

"It was so amazing. I never knew that there would be camels in China. It's like another side of the country," says Santoso, who began to study for his master's degree in computer science in Tiangong University in Tianjin last year.

Before he came to China, he thought it was a country full of technology-related companies — an impression that was bolstered by the fast and convenient technology-driven services that came to be a part of his daily life when he moved to Tianjin.

"I was impressed by China's science and technologies before coming to China. Here, everything is very convenient and interconnected. You can do everything on your phone," says Santoso, referring to services like electronic payment and online shopping.

The cultural trip, however, showed Santoso a view of China when art and goods were transported along the Silk Road more than a thousand years ago. The young man says he was taught a little bit about the Silk Road in his middle school history class.

His grandmother was a Chinese-Indonesian. He was even given a Chinese name, You Liangshan, when he was born. Every year, his family celebrates the Chinese Lunar New Year and they send red envelopes filled with money to young family members — a Lunar New Year tradition.

Santoso says he became interested in Chinese culture as a child. He even learned Chinese calligraphy for half a semester, which helped a little when he was invited to an ink painting with a Chinese artist.

All the students taking part in the cultural trip, organized by the China Public Relations Association, were invited to paint a picture together, although it was their first time drawing with ink on rice paper.

Ink painter Zhang Lucheng taught them how to do it and helped improve the painting. Zhang asked the students to carefully observe camels when riding them because camels would be the subject of the painting.

"The camel is a cultural symbol on the Silk Road. It can also be seen as a medium to spread art and culture along the route. Perceptions of camels by people across the globe are the same," explains Zhang on why he chose camels as a subject for these students, most of whom had never experienced using an ink brush before.

Zhang's style is *daxieyi*, an abstract ink painting that uses relaxed freehand techniques. In just several strokes, with Zhang's deft brushwork, the camel takes shape and the desert appears.

Top: Students taking part in a cultural trip, organized by the China Public Relations Association, complete an ink painting focusing on camels in the desert with the help of artist Zhang Lucheng (first from right).
Above: A sculpture teacher from the Dunhuang College of Northwest Normal University showcases the process of producing Buddhist statues to international students in Dunhuang.

> Painting from Europe and Asia blends with Chinese art in Dunhuang. Chinese art started here and was spread to the world, only to return to China after being mixed with the art of other nations."
>
> **Zhang Lucheng**, artist

"*Daxieyi* demonstrates a kind of Chinese philosophy. You don't draw everything in detail, but leave a space for viewers to imagine," he says.

"The landscapes along the Silk Road are magnificent. Mountains, grasslands and desert, they are all very splendid and grand. Applying *daxieyi* style enables us to express that in the best possible way."

Zhang drew a camel in the center of the painting, and students added in other elements, such as the sun, the footprints of the camels, mountains, plants and houses. Finally, they were encouraged to write their names on it in their own language to jointly complete the painting.

The artist says the creation process was interesting. It's a mix of people from various cultural backgrounds, just like Dunhuang, where art from the East and the West combines with each other.

He mentions the Mogao Caves, which the students visited. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to hundreds of grottoes that house thousands of murals and statues and is one of the finest Buddhist art collections in China. Traces of how the art was introduced to China from the West and localized by Chinese artists can be easily found in the murals.

"Painting from Europe and Asia blends with Chinese art in Dunhuang. Chinese art started here and was spread to the world, only to return to China after being mixed with the art of other nations," adds Zhang.

Santoso says he can tell the difference between the Buddha figures painted on the murals and those in his culture. As a Buddhist himself, he was fascinated by the art in the caves.

Jalil Fazila from Pakistan was also stunned by the murals and their bright colors, as well as their good condition after more than 1,000 years.

"For me, painting is an activity through which we can express our feelings with a pen and vivid colors. It's a convenient way to spread a message and enable people in other places to understand us," says the 26-year-old doctoral student from the University of Science and Technology Beijing. She painted a camel on the rice paper, which she says looked "very weird" compared with Zhang's. Her first time painting inspired her to learn more about Chinese culture in the future.

Fazila's most memorable experience on the trip was her spontaneous dancing with students from the Dunhuang College of Northwest Normal University, where Fazila and her peers were taught a Dunhuang-style dance, choreographed based on figures depicted in the murals at the Mogao Caves.

The costumes that the dancers wore are similar to those worn in one province of Pakistan, says Fazila, and their moves and gestures reminded her of Indian dancing, which is also similar to that of her hometown. "I don't know what made me dance spontaneously with these men and women. Maybe the environment, the passion or the music. At that moment, I just wanted to dance with them. So amazing and exciting," says Fazila.

She danced in her own style while surrounded by other students performing the Dunhuang dance. She also invited these local dancers to join her in performing to a piece of Pakistani music.

Fazila came to Beijing for her master's degree in 2019. She is from Lahore, the second-largest city in Pakistan, which boasts many historical landmarks.

She is also interested in Chinese culture. The Dunhuang trip for her is about gaining knowledge.

"I explored so many things about the tradition, the history, the religion and the mural art. I hope to stay in China in the future to learn more about the country," she says.

At the Dunhuang college, Fazila and other students were grouped with art students to color patterns copied from Dunhuang murals, which was "a very different artistic experience", she says.

Ink painter Zhang says that the murals are essential learning for Chinese ink painters, who want to enhance their skills.

When Zhang was in his 20s, he stayed in Dunhuang for several years to learn from the murals. At that time, even the harsh environment couldn't smother Zhang's passion to learn. "The art in Dunhuang is a mix of the world's art. For Chinese artists, it influences our skills and is a source of creativity and inspiration for our production," says Zhang.

The cultural trip is part of a program, titled *Generation Z 2023: The Future of the Silk Road*, to invite students from various cultural backgrounds in China to experience Chinese culture. It has also organized another two trips, including one for music and one for food, which took place late last month.

Contact the writer at dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Fendi celebrates Chinese ethnic group's craftsmanship

Italian luxury house exhibits handbags made in collaboration with Yi people

Under the brand's "hand in hand" initiative, luxury brand Fendi launches an exhibition at Temple Dongjingyuan in Beijing on Tuesday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Honoring its appreciation for Italian craftsmanship and new discoveries about the Yi ethnic group, luxury brand Fendi launched an exhibition at Temple Dongjingyuan in Beijing on Tuesday.

As part of efforts under the brand's "hand in hand" initiative, the exhibition set the stage for craftspeople and artists to express themselves, showcasing Fendi's exchanges and collaborations in celebration of the luxury house's icons.

Conceived in Italy in 2020 and in evolution worldwide, "hand in hand" is a grassroots partnership between Fendi and local artisans, which highlights the Baguette bag — designed by Artistic Director of Accessories and Menswear Silvia Venturini Fendi in 1997 — as an icon of the house and an instantly recognizable canvas for perpetual transformation.

Jike Junyi, curator, singer and member of the Yi ethnic group, and Kylie Ying, curator, collector and co-founder of Art021, JingArt and DnA Shenzhen, attended the event.

The Fendi Baguette "hand in hand" initiative calls upon a diverse group of ateliers and workshops to interpret the bag by applying their local craft to transform its traditional construction into an artwork.

The name "hand in hand" represents the encounter of the local artisans' hands with the Fendi artisans' hands, giving life to a collaboration where ancient handmade techniques of profound value come together in the creation of these one-of-a-kind pieces.

Above and beyond the creation of artisanal Fendi products, "hand in hand" established a strong network of human relationships and is a crucial step in preserving and transmitting the rare craft, creativity and savoir-faire of these local artisans around the world, according to the brand.

It is the third venue in the world and the second outside Italy. The first exhibition was in the Fendi headquarters in Rome in 2021, and the second was held in Tokyo, Japan, in April 2023.

To celebrate the opening of the exhibition in China, the fashion house worked with the Yi ethnic group, one of the oldest in southwest China.

It worked together with artisans Axi Wuzhimo, who learned traditional Yi embroidery when she was 10 and is now head of the "Yi Needle Yi Thread" professional embroidery cooperative, and Legu Shari — Legu meaning craftsmen in Yi language — whose family is known for silver jewelry making skills that have been passed down to the 14th generation.

As inheritors of the Yi intangible cultural heritage, the two artisans created a Baguette in a velvety black fabric embroidered with blue, green and aqua green silk threads, and lined with green silk satin.

In the Yi culture, black symbolizes the Earth, while green stands for the lush grass and trees that grow around mountains and rivers. The embroidery is inspired by nature, represented by the azalea flower, a symbol of beauty, and combines various types of stitching to obtain a vivid and tactile effect.

The 925-sterling silver "FF" buckle was crafted through a complex process where silver was melted and turned into flakes or delicate filigree wires, which were then worked on to create beautiful designs and three-dimensional decorations. Finally, the bag was enriched with tassels and silver pendants inspired by traditional Yi silver ornaments.

The Yi creation was showcased in an immersive space dedicated to the Baguette, along with 23 other "hand in hand" Baguette bags selected from the Italian editions of the project, each handmade in a different region in collaboration with local artisans.

For the occasion, two Yi craftsmen Jigu Jijimo and Naigu Chenglong, along with Italian artisans Vincenzo Bossio and Elena Ciarrocchi attended the exhibition to showcase live the craft skills used in the creation of the Baguette bags.

The exhibition scenography created a collision of digital and physical experience, framing the artisanal process of the project within a historical and cultural narrative.

Floor-to-ceiling LED screens projected visions of extraordinary patience and skill, as artisans sketch designs, prepare materials, practice age-old techniques and reveal the intergenerational secrets of the ancestral art.

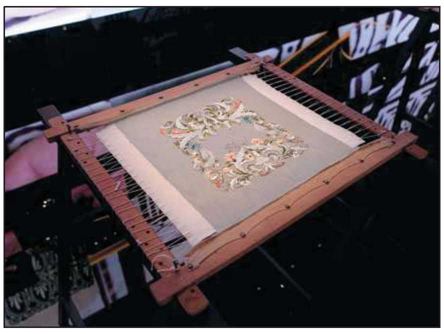
In a tribute to craftsmanship, design and art through Fendi icons, the exhibition featured a special area dedicated to the Peekaboo bag created by Silvia Venturini Fendi in 2008.

A selection of Peekaboo bags at the exhibition were created over the years by international designers, artists and famous personalities. They were invited by Fendi to customize a white canvas Peekaboo or create their own version of the bag during special occasions for the luxury house, including the Peekaboo Projects and the Peekaboo 10th anniversary.

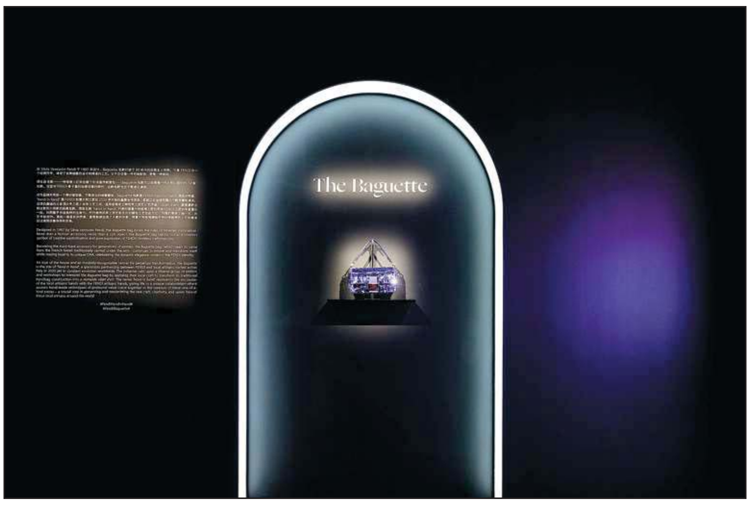
The selection included Peekaboo bags reinterpreted by architect Zaha Hadid, British singer Adele, actress Angelababy, Olympic diving champion Guo Jingjing, designer Chris Wolston and artists Liang Yuanwei, Oscar Wang and Tim Yip, who transformed the Peekaboo through their work into a piece of art.

Contributing to the celebration, three new Peekaboo bags customized by talented local contemporary artists Lu Pingyuan, Ni Youyu and Chen Fenwan were unveiled in the exhibition.

The house of Fendi was established by Edoardo and Adele Fendi in Rome in 1925. The first Fendi boutique was a handbag shop and was then followed with a fur workshop. In 2000, the LVMH Group acquired Fendi and became its majority shareholder in 2001.



Clockwise from top: A selection of Peekaboo bags created by international designers, artists and famous personalities is displayed at the exhibition. Embroidery works made by Italian craftsmen are one-of-a-kind and specially created for the event. The traditional embroidery process of the Italian craftsmen is showcased.



From left: One of the highlights of the event is the Baguette bag, an icon of Fendi and an instantly recognizable blank canvas for the artists to work on. The Beijing event is the third in the world and the second outside Italy to be held by the brand under the "hand in hand" initiative, which sets the stage for craftspeople and artists to express themselves.

Select look at Baguette bags created for "hand in hand"

By YUAN SHENGGAO

This Baguette bag was created by Axi Wuzhimo, who learned traditional Yi embroidery when she was 10, and Legu Shari, a 14th-generation expert at silver jewelry making.

The velvety black fabric of the bag is embroidered with blue, green and aqua-green silk threads lined with green silk satin. The pattern on the bag, representing azalea flowers, a symbol of beauty, combines various stitch types to obtain a vivid and tactile effect.

This bag was created by artist Lu Pingyuan who customized this canvas Peekaboo bag to deconstruct the story of the Grimm brothers' fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* and created the interior of the candy house on the surface of the bag.

Combining a series of sculptures that look like cookies, realized through three-dimensional wood carving and hollow processing, he gives life to the classic story.

This Peekaboo bag was created by artist and curator Ni Youyu who used the 12 constellations as a theme for his creation after learning about the history of Fendi.

The top of the bag is inspired by the way Ni labels and signs his paintings with gold lettering against a black background.

This bag was customized by artist Chen Fenwan who combined Chinese folk paper-cutting with contemporary art.

Featuring used paper in bright colors, the bag becomes a 3D forest landscape, which expresses the artist's creativity and the possibility of paper art.

This plant-based Baguette was created by Fabbrica Tessile Bossio who was inspired by local traditional motifs in the province of Cosenza in Calabria in Italy. The iconic FF logo pattern is dyed with natural plant-based tinctures.

This Peekaboo breaks away from the classic look with a geometric and original design created by architect Zaha Hadid.

YOUTH

Master of the arts

Viral sensation carries on family legacy of imparting the wisdom, heritage and skills of Chinese martial traditions to a new generation, **Wang Ru** and **Ma Jingna** report in Lanzhou.

In 2021, a video which shows a woman wielding more than 20 traditional weapons one after another went viral online, providing a feast of Chinese martial arts for the viewer. The slender woman, dressed in black, wielded swords, broadswords, clubs, daggers and even heavy hammers quickly, skillfully and with vigor, just like a heroine in a martial arts novel.

Since then, Zhang Hanliang, who has practiced martial arts for more than two decades, has uploaded more videos of her using other traditional Chinese weapons, and continues to attract attention online. The number of followers she has on China's video platform Bilibili has, thus far, reached 1 million.

She was also invited to demonstrate her techniques at last year's Lantern Festival Gala broadcast by China Media Group, and this year's CMG online Spring Festival Gala.

Zhang, 36, a champion of many domestic and international martial arts competitions, now works as a physical education teacher at Tianshui Normal University in Tianshui, Northwest China's Gansu province, where she imparts her martial arts skills to her students. In recent years, she has trained many successful competitive martial artists. She also works to spread the culture of China's martial arts abroad, in countries like France, Russia and Malaysia.

Zhang was born in 1987 into a family of martial arts practitioners in Wushan county, Tianshui. Her family discovered that the girl had talent, so when she turned 9 years old, they sent her to a sports school in Wuwei, Gansu, to systematically learn the necessary skills.

At the time, she was the youngest student at the school, but the difficulties of learning martial arts didn't scare her. According to Zhang, she and her classmates got up at 5:30 am every day to start their practice. They ran in cold winds during winter and through the scorching days of summer, and she still recalls the pain of stretching and pulling her ligaments to warm up for practice every day.

When she was learning a difficult maneuver or how to wield a new weapon, she often got injured. For example, when she learned to do a flip, she often landed on her head, which was not only painful, but also left her dazed. But, undeterred, she would insist on trying again and again until she mastered the skill.

As well as the assigned daily practice, she actively sought further tasks to learn by herself, trying her best to polish her techniques.

"The first lesson I learned from practicing martial arts was to be tough and conquer difficulties. In the face of obstacles, you must defeat the fear in your heart at first. Confidence, courage and careful thinking are very important for improving your martial arts skills," says Zhang.

Her efforts were not in vain. She won her first championship at a swordsmanship competition in Gansu, when she was only 13. Later, she took the first place in a number of other domestic and international martial arts competitions she participated in.

She also learned how to wield many weapons from her family members, just as she shows in her videos. Among them she has a special favor for swords. "A Chinese folk saying mentions that, 'the sword is the weapon for a person of virtue'. I spent much more time improving my swordsmanship than using other weapons. Therefore, I'm especially good at it," says Zhang.

Now, collecting various weapons has become a hobby of hers. "I feel excited when I see a new weapon and want to try it," says Zhang.

From top: Martial artist Zhang Hanliang practices tai chi in a garden in Lanzhou, Gansu province, in 2021; Zhang (front) leads some tai chi lovers from Norway at Tianshui Normal University in Gansu in 2019; Zhang learns martial arts from her father; and she tutors some students at a school in Lanzhou last year. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> Confidence, courage and careful thinking are very important for improving your martial arts skills."
>
> **Zhang Hanliang,** PE teacher, Tianshui Normal University

Zhang has learned from practicing martial arts that they are not only about techniques, but also the cultural connotations behind them. "When I learned martial arts from my father, he told me the arts are not only about certain movements, but a profound culture, like the pursuit of harmony between people and nature. When you think about the martial arts more deeply, you can find philosophical wisdom contained within," says Zhang.

Zhang's father, Zhang Hongmou, used to be a master of Tongbei Martial Arts, a school that originated in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He gained great fame as one of the 100 martial arts masters in China by the Wushu Administrative Center of the General Administration of Sports of China in 1995.

The family tradition has endowed Zhang Hanliang with a lasting love for the culture of Chinese martial arts, and a sense of responsibility to spread it. "When I say I want to spread the culture of Chinese martial arts, I mean I want to spread the skills of martial arts, their cultural background and the lofty moral standards they highlight," says Zhang Hanliang.

According to her, moral standards were very much emphasized by martial arts practitioners in the old days. "Older generations of my family pursued both professional excellence and moral integrity, and it was very difficult to be a master's apprentice, unless they went through long-term tests," she says.

But now, learning martial arts is no longer that demanding, since anyone can pay to learn them. "Martial arts develop with the times. I think it's reasonable, but that can only be done on the basis of keeping its traditional culture and not destroying its system," she adds.

From Zhang Hanliang's perspective, martial arts in today's society still have a valuable function. "People learn them not to become a swordsman, but for self-defense and the health benefits they offer," says Zhang Hanliang.

Years of being put through the mill has tempered her, made her tough, and kept inspiring her in daily life. "That's why I hope more people can get to know and learn martial arts," she says.

In 2003, she was enrolled at Gansu University of Political Science and Law in Lanzhou as an undergraduate majoring in English, and was recruited by Tianshui Normal University as a PE teacher in 2007.

"After my videos became popular, that seemed to ignite my students' martial arts dreams. I can really feel their curiosity and passion," says Zhang Hanliang.

According to Ran Jianfei, who used to be a student of hers, Zhang Hanliang is a very careful and hardworking teacher. "She patiently and repeatedly taught us the martial arts movements. Moreover, she reminded us to keep improving our morality and to learn more general knowledge, encouraged us to read ancient classics, as well as stressed the importance of possessing both integrity and ability," Ran said in an interview last year.

Contact the writers at wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

Songwriter pursues her dream with debut album release

By CHEN NAN
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

In 2017, when composer Li Fei was commissioned to write songs for *Chinese Cities*, a TV show produced and aired by China Central Television, she traveled around the country to collect local music elements.

The weekly TV show introduced the history and culture of different Chinese cities, in a bid to promote tourism. As each episode aired, Li's songs were enjoyed by the viewers.

On Saturday, Li released her debut album, *Pursuing the Common Dream*, in Beijing, which features over 30 original songs.

The songs that Li wrote for the TV show are featured on the album, including *Shan Shui Jian* (Between Mountains and Rivers), which Li wrote for Loudi, a city in Hunan province that is an important railway hub, and *Yi* (Memory), which she composed for Hangzhou, a popular city for tourists in Zhejiang province.

"When I was a young musician, I focused on studying the techniques of songwriting. As I grew up and gained life experience, I learned that what really matters for a songwriter is the emotions behind songs. I love traveling and meeting with people, which inspires me," says Li.

According to Mei Xiangrong, the album's executive supervisor, he met Li when they worked together on the TV show and he was impressed by Li, who spent a long time traveling around the country to collect folk songs and the sounds of different folk instruments, which she later incorporated into her own songwriting.

"She is a very talented young musician and full of imagination. When she studied the cities featured in the TV show, she soon developed ideas about how to portray their history, culture and natural scenery through music," says Mei.

The album is named after the song *Pursuing the Common Dream*, which was written by Li to celebrate the 25th Acrobatic Gymnastics World Championships held in Putian, Fujian province, in 2016.

Composer Li Fei at the release ceremony of her debut album, *Pursuing the Common Dream*, in Beijing on Saturday. The album features over 30 original songs. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

There was also an English version of the song, titled *Let's Meet Heart and Soul*, which had translator Huang Youyi contribute to the lyrics. Chinese singers, including pop star Sun Nan, soprano Chen Xiaoduo and tenor Wang Chuanyue, performed the two versions of the song.

> As I grew up and gained life experience, I learned that what really matters for a songwriter is the emotions behind songs."
>
> **Li Fei,** composer

"Over the past decades, I've written songs for many national events and galas, which allowed me to express my feelings for those special occasions. I've worked with great lyricists and singers. This debut album is like a review of the musical path that I've walked so far," says Li.

The album also features Li's latest creation, a song titled *Renjian Xinghe* (The Galaxy Among Us), which Li both composed the music and wrote the lyrics for. The song was released last year and performed by veteran Chinese baritone Liao Changyong. With heartwarming lyrics and a comforting melody, the song was dedicated to people fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Born in Fushun, Liaoning province, Li learned to play the piano as a child. She had her first piano recital in her hometown when she was 13. Later, she came to Beijing to study piano at the China Conservatory of Music, where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees.

Now, she serves as the deputy chief of the creation and research division of the musical art center of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles.

SPORTS

GOLF

China's Dou stands tall after near-miss

Marty Dou Zecheng of China tracks a tee shot during the final round of the Byron Nelson at TPC Craig Ranch on Sunday in Dallas, Texas. The 26-year-old finished tied-fifth, three shots behind winner Jason Day of Australia. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Dou Zecheng waits to play a putt on the 18th green during the final round of the Byron Nelson on Sunday. Dou's top-five finish lifted him to No 119 in the FedExCup points list. AP

Dou Zecheng tracks a shot out of the rough on the 12th hole during the final round of the Byron Nelson. Dou closed with a 67 after registering scores of 63, 70 and 64. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Top-five finish at prestigious PGA Tour tourney a major confidence boost

By CHINA DAILY

China's Marty Dou Zecheng took plenty of positives from his performance after a close brush with glory at the AT&T Byron Nelson at TPC Craig Ranch in Dallas, Texas, on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Dou, who was in a three-way tie for the overnight lead, charged into a two-stroke advantage with four birdies over the opening seven holes of the $9.5 million tournament, but his hopes of becoming the first Chinese mainland winner on the PGA Tour were soon derailed by a misjudged approach shot.

With his ball lying in the rough on the par-4 8th hole, Dou caught a flyer, sending his ball out of bounds at the back of the green to pencil down a costly double bogey.

The young Chinese bravely fought back with a birdie at the next hole, but Australian Jason Day charged home with a stunning 62 to secure his 13th PGA Tour victory.

Dou's consolation was a tied-fifth finish — his first top-10 on the elite circuit.

"Big mistake on No 8 when the ball was on the edge of the rough," Dou conceded.

"The lie looked OK but I caught a flyer and ended in OB. It's a pity. On this course, everyone is going low, like what Jason did. That hole cost me two strokes. I was still generally good after that hole but I just couldn't get more birdies compared to the front nine," added Dou, who tied Scottie Scheffler (65) and Tyrell Hatton for fifth position on 20-under 264, three behind the winner.

Day won his first PGA Tour event in five years on Sunday, closing with a 9-under 62 for a one-shot victory over Austin Eckroat of the US and Kim Si-woo of South Korea

Playing on Mother's Day a little more than a year after losing his mom to cancer, Day finished 23-under while ending his victory drought the week before the PGA Championship.

Despite carrying the pressure of holding the 54-hole lead for the first time on the PGA Tour, Dou looked poised playing in the final group. He made birdies from inside of nine feet on holes 1, 4, 5 and 7 to take charge at TPC Craig Ranch, which is his home course, before finding trouble on No 8. He registered two more birdies against a bogey on his inward nine.

"I had a solid start, and didn't have too many thoughts. I could feel I was in good form. A tied-fifth finish will give me great confidence for the remainder of the season. I had improvements on my ball-striking … my driving and putting helped give me good scores. I hope to keep playing like this," said Dou, who holds three wins on the developmental Korn Ferry Tour.

"I had no issues focusing or with my mental approach. Hole No 8 had nothing to do with the swing or my mental thoughts, it was just an error in judgment.

"It could have happened to anyone. It just so happened to be me when I was leading. It's a pity but it's also acceptable."

The top-five finish pushed Dou from 169th to 119th on the latest FedExCup points list where the top 125 players will earn exemptions into full-field PGA Tour events in 2024. The top 50 after the FedExCup Playoffs will be fully exempt for the newly created Designated events next year.

"I will try to get into the top 50 or top 70, so I can be a bit more relaxed during the fall season," he said.

Chinese Taipei's CT Pan, meanwhile, fired a career-best 9-under 62 to finish solo fourth, just weeks after making a welcome return from a long injury layoff. The one-time PGA Tour winner produced a near flawless final round, sinking two stunning eagles, six birdies and a lone bogey to finish two strokes behind Day.

Pan, 31, was delighted to regain his best form as he earned $465,500 and 135 FedExCup points which saw him move up to 142nd position.

"You know, just before the round, I was trying to give myself a lot of birdies putts. I know the greens are soft because we had quite a bit of rain overnight, and we played the ball up, as well," said Pan.

"On the back nine, pretty crazy …. I had two eagles. I don't think I've ever done that before, and shot 62, my lowest round on the PGA Tour. Just really cool to do it on Sunday and on the PGA Tour."

BASKETBALL

Morant awaits review of latest gun video

Ja Morant still had his endorsement deals on Monday. While his latest gun video on social media is costing him plenty in public relations currency, he hasn't lost any money.

Any, or all, of that could change any day. Once again, Morant is in limbo — awaiting the outcome of yet another NBA investigation into what could end up becoming a cataclysmic off-court decision.

"This is going to be a hot question," Syracuse professor of sport management Rick Burton said Monday. "I don't think they can hit pause on this. I think that there will be too much demand for, 'What are you going to do?'"

The NBA already suspended the two-time All-Star guard eight games in March for livestreaming himself holding an apparent handgun in Colorado. That cost him about $669,000 in salary.

How Morant's sponsors react to him being caught on social media apparently holding a weapon for the second time in less than three months is another issue.

Morant has endorsement deals with Nike and the sports drink Powerade, which is owned by Coca-Cola. Endorsement deals traditionally include confidentiality and morality clauses.

Representatives of Nike, which started selling Morant's Ja 1 shoes on April 19, did not return a message from The Associated Press on Monday. Powerade pulled his ad almost immediately after the March video.

In April, Morant countersued a Memphis teenager accusing the Grizzlies guard of punching him during a pickup court fight last summer at Morant's home. The countersuit noted the lawsuit jeopardized relationships with sponsors including some "unconsummated deals".

Burton, commissioner of Australia's National Basketball League from 2003-07, said research shows some athletes believe negativity can help them break out as a "perfect-pitch person" Burton wrote in 2001 about the demand for antiheroes or athletes with controversial images.

"I'm sure the people at Nike are trying to figure out, 'Does this make him more relevant to a certain audience? And is this something we're going to ride out?'" said Burton, who noted Nike doesn't often give up on an athlete trending negatively.

Memphis suspended Morant on Sunday from team activities, though that's unclear what that involves in the offseason.

The Grizzlies were eliminated from the playoffs in the first round. Charity events are the biggest offseason events until training camp in late September. Players start receiving game checks when the season begins in October.

Criminal charges are not likely with no indication of where the latest Instagram video was streamed.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

TENNIS

Alcaraz gets French Open wake-up call

ROME — Carlos Alcaraz didn't see this one coming. How could he have?

About to reclaim the No 1 ranking, Alcaraz was pretty much pushed off the court at the Italian Open by 135th-ranked Hungarian qualifier Fabian Marozsan 6-3, 7-6 (4) in the third round on Monday.

Alcaraz suffered his earliest defeat since October.

He had won 30 of 32 matches this year and was on a 12-match winning streak on clay after consecutive titles in Barcelona and Madrid. He secured a return to the top spot next week by winning his opening match in Rome. But he was caught off guard by how Marozsan, 23, dictated with spectacular play all over the court, including drop shots that Alcaraz had no answer for.

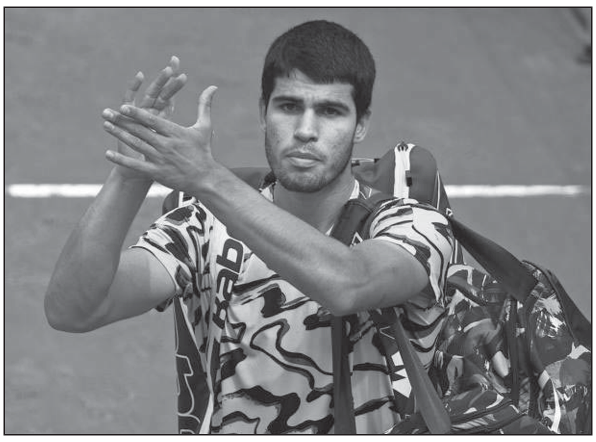
"I just didn't feel comfortable. He made me feel uncomfortable on court," Alcaraz said. "He was aggressive all the time. He was playing inside the baseline all the time. It was tough for me to get into the match, into the rally. I made a lot of mistakes that I usually don't make too much."

The result means Alcaraz will go into the French Open — which starts in less than two weeks and where he will be the top seed — coming off a dispiriting defeat.

Making matters even more surprising was that this is the first time Marozsan is playing in the main draw of an ATP tournament.

"He surprised me a lot. His level was really, really high," Alcaraz said. "I'm sure he's going to break the top 100 very, very soon."

Marozsan posted his first victories over top-100 players in the first two rounds when he beat No 67 Corentin Moutet and No 32 Jiri Lehecka.



Carlos Alcaraz applauds fans following the Spaniard's surprise loss to Hungary's Fabian Marozsan, ranked No 135 in the world, at the Italian Open in Rome on Monday. REUTERS

"Everything was perfect today: The crowd, the weather, the court," Marozsan said after stunning the packed stadium on Campo Centrale.

"I just try to do something special or winning a few games or maybe a set or something like this, and I just beat the world No 1 — he's our best in the sport."

Alcaraz led 4-1 in the tiebreaker but Marozsan won six straight points to close it out.

"It's amazing. I don't know what happened during the points," Marozsan said. "I just try to hit back every ball and try to do my best."

Late in the second set, Alcaraz tried firing himself up by yelling "Vamos" every time he won a significant point. But Marozsan just kept coming, unleashing an 82 mph (132 kph) backhand winner up the line to conclude one point and winning several close exchanges at the net.

By the end, Marozan had twice as many winners as Alcaraz, 24 to 12, and far fewer unforced errors, 13 to 24.

"I couldn't follow his level," Alcaraz said. "He was at the same level the whole match. That is very, very difficult. He deserves the win. If he plays at that level, he's going to surprise more than one (player)."

Marozsan will next face Borna Coric, who beat Roberto Carballes Baena 7-6 (3), 6-1.

Djokovic praise

World No 1 Novak Djokovic said Alcaraz is the man to beat on clay and is one of the top title contenders for the French Open.

Alcaraz has won back-to-back clay-court titles in Barcelona and Madrid after beginning an injury-hit season with the Buenos Aires crown. Despite his shock loss to Marozsan, he is poised to leapfrog Djokovic into top spot in the rankings after the Italian Open.

Rafa Nadal, a 14-time champion at Roland Garros, has been dealing with a hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open in January and fears are growing the Spaniard may miss the Paris Grand Slam.

Djokovic, 35, told reporters in Rome that Alcaraz was worthy of the No 1 ranking. "He has been playing some very impressive tennis, a great level. He's the player to beat on this surface, no doubt," he said.

"Of course, it depends on if Nadal is going to play in the French Open or not. But Alcaraz is one of the top favorites without any dilemma."

Djokovic, who skipped the American hard-court swing as he was unvaccinated for COVID-19, said he hoped to reignite his rivalry with US Open champion Alcaraz.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion, who was due to face Britain's Cameron Norrie in the fourth round in Rome, said he had overcome a right elbow problem that kept him out of Madrid.

"It's all good. There's always some things here and there that bother you at this level. It's normal," Djokovic said. "When you're not 25 anymore, I guess you experience that a bit more than what used to be the case."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

SPORTS

SOCCER

Fascinating second leg in store, with breakout star Camavinga seen as key to Madrid hopes of scuppering Manchester City's dream

Titans clash in Euro showdown

A REAL battle royale

Real Madrid hearts were in mouths when Eduardo Camavinga limped off against Getafe in La Liga on Saturday, ahead of the team's Champions League showdown with Manchester City.

The 20-year-old French midfielder has become a key figure for Carlo Ancelotti's reigning European champion and an injury would have been a big setback for the semifinal, second leg at the Etihad Stadium on Wednesday.

Ancelotti soothed Madrid fears in his postgame news conference, saying Camavinga twisted his knee but it would heal quickly and was not a worry.

Spanish media have since reported that Camavinga will be fit, with the tie on a knife edge after the first leg finished 1-1 last Tuesday.

Camavinga played a key role in Vinicius Junior's brilliant strike in that game, charging up the pitch from leftback to help Madrid take the lead in the first half.

The Frenchman exchanged passes with Luka Modric to break free of City's press and carried the ball down to the other end, before feeding his Brazilian teammate.

However, Camavinga was also partly to blame for City's equalizer, with his pass intercepted before Kevin De Bruyne hammered home.

Playing on the left of the defense, instead of his natural central-midfield position, means Camavinga does occasionally make mistakes, but is becoming more reliable game by game — even if he would prefer to be deployed elsewhere.

"The most important thing is to help the team, and today I did that again, but no, it still isn't my position," he said after helping Madrid see off Chelsea in the Champions League quarterfinals.

Ancelotti lately in big games has simply tried to get his best 11 players onto the pitch in his lineups, which has resulted in Toni Kroos playing a holding-midfield role, and Camavinga used at leftback.

That versatility has helped him become a regular for Madrid, instead of battling with Kroos and Aurelien Tchouameni for a start in the No 6 role.

Even that is not Camavinga's best position, having operated further forward in midfield at Rennes, but Modric and Fede Valverde are holding those spots down in the key games.

Learning on the job at leftback, Camavinga's positioning has occasionally cost him, particularly in his first matches there, but he is improving quickly and does not receive a lot of defensive help from Vinicius.

Last season Camavinga was important for Madrid as it clinched a record-extending 14th Champions League title. However, he was mainly utilized off the bench in the final phases of games.

The midfielder brought energy to the team and paced it through draining extra-time periods against Chelsea and Manchester City in the semifinals.

However, as Madrid hit the home straight this season, Camavinga has become far more central to the team's success — despite playing out wide, making 54 appearances across all competitions.

Slow start

Camavinga's Madrid career moved slowly at first after arriving in the summer of 2021 in a deal worth up to 40 million euros ($44 million), despite his exciting breakthrough at Rennes.

In 2019, he became the Ligue 1 side's youngest-ever player at 16 years, four months and 27 days old; in 2020, he became France's youngest debutant since 1914.

In the Spanish capital, he has slowly gained importance but also been moved further back down the pitch. It is clear he will play a big part in Los Blancos' future, but in which role is not so certain.

As well as Tchouameni and Valverde, Madrid has also been linked with a big summer move for another midfielder in Borussia Dortmund's Jude Bellingham.

"I'm surprised how quickly he's adapted to Madrid because it's a very big club and it's not easy," said ex-Madrid midfielder Claude Makelele earlier this month. "I see him as a footballer with a great future."

Manchester City may view Camavinga as Madrid's weak link after his first-leg mistake, but he also emerged with the most tackles made and duels won, keeping Bernardo Silva quiet.

However, with the likes of Jack Grealish, Ilkay Gundogan, De Bruyne and Erling Haaland all hitting top gear now, Madrid's entire defense will need to be completely in the zone from the first whistle to the last on Wednesday to withstand the City juggernaut.

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> **Claude Makelele,** former Madrid midfielder on Eduardo Camavinga

> "It is so difficult to find a player that plays at this speed and has the ability to see the passes more than when (a player) is more calm or walking."
>
> **Pep Guardiola,** Man City boss on Kevin De Bruyne

De Bruyne bids to validate genius with Champions League glory

Real Madrid managed to blunt Manchester City's scoring phenom Erling Haaland in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal, but there was no stopping the brilliance of Kevin De Bruyne.

The Belgian's thunderbolt at the Bernabeu left the tie delicately balanced at 1-1 heading into Wednesday's second leg, but with City oozing confidence thanks to a 100 percent record in 14 home games in 2023.

Pep Guardiola's men are four matches away from becoming just the second English side to ever win the treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in the same season.

A fifth league title in six seasons is as good as won with a maximum of three points needed from City's final three games.

Manchester United will have the chance to prevent the Red Devils' treble in 1998/99 being matched in the FA Cup final.

Whoever emerges victorious at the Etihad will be installed as the big favorite to be crowned European champion against either Inter Milan or AC Milan in Istanbul next month. So, Madrid is the biggest obstacle between City and its history quest.

Madrid's own run to Champions League glory last season was fueled by goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois' perceived slight at his reputation in England.

"I don't think I get enough respect, especially in England," said the former Chelsea stopper after his man-of-the-match performance denied Liverpool in the final.

For his international teammate De Bruyne, it is the opposite.

Widely considered one of the Premier League's finest imports, the 31-year-old has twice been crowned players' player of the year by his peers alongside a growing haul of 10 major trophies under Guardiola.

But City's failure to get over the line in the Champions League and the absence of any silverware with Belgium means he has not always commanded the same level of respect on the continent.

De Bruyne's third-placed finish in the Ballon d'Or voting last year is the highest of his career.

'Best brain'

That could all change should he be the one to make the difference and put Madrid to the sword, as he did in the first leg.

"I've come across a lot of players, played with a lot of players, saw a lot of players, played against some of the greatest. I think Kevin, his brain is the best I've ever seen," said Arsenal and Barcelona great Thierry Henry, who worked with De Bruyne during two spells as an assistant coach with Belgium.

"I saw him for six years on and off with Belgium. You love the man a bit more because I saw stuff he did in training and in games. He's unbelievable. His brain, I'm still thinking about some stuff I've seen, he's on a different planet."

Despite Haaland's half-century of goals, De Bruyne is arguably more important to City's success.

He scored twice as the defending champion landed a telling blow on Arsenal in the Premier League title race last month. But creativity rather than goals is the currency in which De Bruyne's influence is best measured.

He has 27 assists in 43 appearances this season, becoming the fastest player to 100 Premier League assists in the process.

"He's not comfortable to play with a pause, he needs to play with speed," said Guardiola. "It is so difficult to find a player that plays at this speed and has the ability to see the passes more than when (a player) is more calm or walking.

"The normal players, when you walk, you see everything. But when you run a high speed, you are not able to see what happened. He's completely the opposite. That's why he is an exceptional player."

Much like his manager, De Bruyne's achievements at City have always come with the caveat of never having won the Champions League. If City wins on Wednesday, those reservations will be consigned to the past.

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